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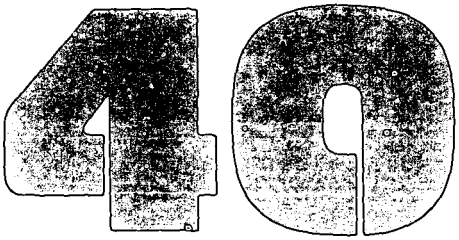

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ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

FALL-WINTER 1977

EDITED BY "Ellery Queen"

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 PARK AVENUE SOUTH
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EDITOR'S NOTE

)ear Reader:

Anatole Broyard has reminded us that the social criticism of he American economist and sociologist, Thorstein Veblen (1857–929), is almost as pertinent now as it was at the turn of the entury—in some ways, Mr. Broyard maintains, it is even more ertinent. Veblen's definition of Victorian manners and mores vas "a congeries of idiosyncracies." Veblen was not thinking, of ourse, of the detective character of Victorian days. But if we pplied his definition to, say, the image of Sherlock Holmes (himelf the image of C. Auguste Dupin), it would be extraordinarily pt, proving that all matters Victorian (including Sherlock Iolmes) were consistently Victorian.

But is the definition of a detective, as derived from Veblen, as ertinent now as it was at the turn of the century? No, the char.cter of the fictional detective has changed. The contemporary leuth is no longer "a congeries of idiosyncracies"—at least, not so nuch so. Witness the detectives in this collection—they are the iew faces of mystery.

The Golden Age of the detective story has passed, and a new Golden Age" is in process, the prelude of other ages to come (for he detective story will never die). Swinburne told us that "all our ast acclaims our future." Lamartine asked, "What is our life but succession of preludes?" And Robinson Jeffers wrote that "all he past is future." In the continuity of time and detective stories he future is always now.

ELLERY QUEEN

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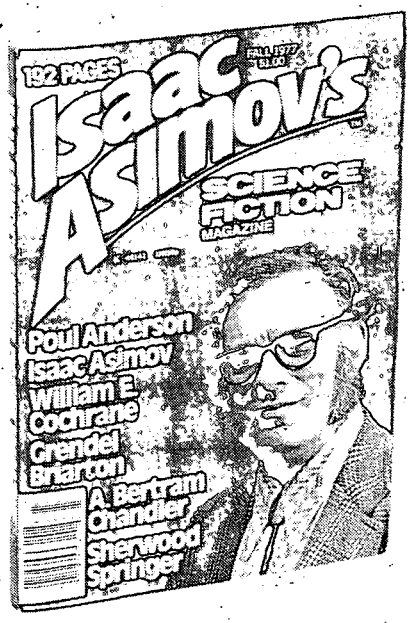

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Rex Stout

The Gun Puzzle

When you read a detective-mystery, what is calculated to rivet you to your chair, making you forget eating, drinking, sleeping, even watching TV? Well, one thing is the unexpected—when what happens next isn't what you expect to happen, when the unfolding of events is one surprise after another.

In this Nero Wolfe short novel, complete in this anthology, it is the unexpected that keeps the pot boiling. As Archie Goodwin, Wolfe's legman and assistant, says: at first there were too many answers, then there were no answers . . . but ultimately, of course, we know there has to be one answer, and one answer only . . .

Detective: NERO WOLFE

The red leather chair was four feet away from the end of Nero Wolfe's desk, so when she got the gun from her handbag she had to get up and take a step to put it on the desk. Then she returned to the chair, closed the bag, and told Wolfe, "That's the gun I'm not going to shoot my husband with."

Sitting facing her with my back to my desk, which was at right angles to Wolfe's, I raised my brows. I hadn't expected her to put on an act. When she had phoned the previous afternoon to ask for an appointment she had of course sounded a little jumpy, as most people do when they call the office of a private detective, but she had been quite matter-of-fact in giving the details.

Her name was Lucy Hazen, Mrs. Barry Hazen. She gave her address, on East 37th Street between Park and Lexington. All she wanted was thirty minutes with Nero Wolfe, to tell him something confidential. She didn't want him to do anything, not even give her advice; she merely wanted to tell him something; and she would pay $100 for the half hour. She could and would pay more if she had to, but she hoped the hundred would be enough.

In November or December, when Wolfe's income has reached a

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point where out of a hundred received he can keep only twenty bucks, he will make an appointment only for someone or something very special; but this was January, no big fee was in prospect, and even a measly C would help in the upkeep of his old brownstone on West 35th Street, including staff, particularly since he wouldn't have to work for it. So it was set for 11:30 the following morning, Tuesday.

When the doorbell rang at 11:30 on the dot and I went to let her in, she gave me a smile and said, "Thank you for getting him to see me." Handshakes can be faked and usually are, but smiles can't. It isn't often that a man gets a natural, friendly, straightforward smile from a young woman who has never seen him before, with no come-on, no catch, and no dare, and the least he can do is return it if he has that kind in stock.

As I took her to the office and helped her off with her coat, which was mink, I was thinking that you never know, even the good-looking wife of a well-known public-relations operator like Barry Hazen could have her feelings on straight. I was pleased to meet her.

So I was disappointed when she put on an act. It is not natural for a woman to open a conversation with a stranger by taking a revolver from her bag and saying that's the gun she isn't going to shoot her husband with. I must have been wrong about the smile, and since I don't like to be wrong I was no longer pleased to meet her. I raised my brows and tightened my lips.

Wolfe, in his oversized chair behind his desk, darted a glance at the gun, returned his eyes to her, and grunted. "I am not impressed," he said, "by histrionics."

"Oh," she said, "I'm not trying to impress you. I'm only telling you. That's what I came for, just to tell you. I thought it would be more—more definite, I guess—if I brought the gun and showed it to you."

"Very well, you have done so." Wolfe was frowning. "I understand that you intend to ask me for no service or advice; you wish only to tell me something in confidence. I should remind you that I am not a lawyer or a priest; a communication from you to me will not be privileged. If you tell me about a crime I can't engage not to disclose it. I mean a serious crime, not some petty offense such as carrying a deadly weapon for which you have no permit."

"I hadn't thought of that, carrying a weapon." She dismissed it with a little gesture. "That's all right. There hasn't been any

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crime and there isn't going to be, that's just the point. That's what I came to tell you, that I'm not going to shoot my husband."

Wolfe's eyes were narrowed at her. He is convinced that all women are dotty or devious, or both, and here was more evidence to support it. "Just that?" he demanded. "You wanted half an hour."

She nodded. She set her teeth on her lip, nice white teeth, and in a moment released it. "Because I thought it would be better if I told you something about. . .why. If you will regard it as confidential."

"With the reservation I have made."

"Of course. You know who my husband is? Barry Hazen, Public Relations?"

"Mr. Goodwin has informed me."

"We were married two years ago. I was the secretary of a client of his, Jules Khoury, the inventor. My father, Titus Postel, was also an inventor, and he was associated with Mr. Khoury until his death five years ago. That's where I met Barry, at Mr. Khoury's office. I thought I really was in love with him. I have tried and tried to decide what was the real reason I married him, I mean the *real* one, whether it was only because I wanted to have—"

She stopped and put her teeth on her lip. She shook her head, with energy, as if to chase a fly. "There you are," she said. "I mean there I am. You don't need to know all that. I'm just blubbering, fishing for pity. You don't even need to know why I want to kill him."

Wolfe muttered, "It's your half hour, madam."

"I don't hate him." She shook her head again. "I think I despise him—I know I do—and he won't let me get a divorce. I tried to leave him, I did leave him, but he made such a— There I go again! I don't *need* to tell you all that!"

"As you please."

"It's not as I please, Mr. Wolfe, it's as I must!"

"As you must, then."

"This is what I *must* tell you. He has a gun in a drawer in his bedroom. That's it there on your desk. We have separate bedrooms. You know how there can be something in your mind but you don't know it's there until all of a sudden there it is?"

"Certainly. The subconscious is not a grave; it's a cistern."

"But we don't know what's in it. I didn't. One day a month ago—it was the day after Christmas—I went to his bedroom and

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took the gun from the drawer and looked to see if it was loaded, and it was, and all of a sudden I was thinking how easy it would be to shoot him while he was in bed asleep. I said to myself, 'You idiot, you absolute idiot,' and put the gun back, and I didn't go near that drawer again. But the thought came back, it kept coming, mostly when I was trying to go to sleep, and it got worse. It got worse this way, it wasn't just going in when he was asleep and getting the gun and shooting him, it was planning how to do it so I wouldn't get caught.

"I knew it was idiotic, but I couldn't stop. I could *not!* And one night, just two nights ago, Sunday night, I got out of bed trembling all over and went to the shower and turned on the cold water and stood under it. I had found a plan that would work. I don't have to tell you what the plan was."

"As you please. As you must."

"It doesn't matter. I went back to bed, but I didn't sleep. I wasn't afraid I might do something in my sleep, I was afraid of what my mind might do. I had found out that I couldn't manage my mind. So yesterday afternoon I decided I would fix it so my mind would have to quit. I would tell someone all about it and then the plan wouldn't work, and no plan would work so I wouldn't get caught.

"Telling a friend wouldn't do, not a real friend, because that would leave a loophole. Of course I couldn't tell the police. I have no pastor because I don't go to church. Then I thought of you, and I phoned for an appointment, and here I am. That's all, except this: I want you to promise that if my husband is shot and killed you will tell the police about my coming here and what I said."

Wolfe grunted.

She unlocked her fingers, straightened her shoulders, and took a long deep breath—in with her mouth closed and out with it open. "There!" she said. "That's it."

Wolfe was regarding her. "I engaged only to listen," he said, "but I must offer a comment. Your stratagem should be effective as a self-deterrent, but what if someone else shoots him? And I report this conversation to the police? You'll be in a pickle."

"Not if I didn't do it."

"Pfui. Of course you will, unless the culprit is soon exposed."

"If I didn't do it I wouldn't care." She extended a hand, palm up. "Mr. Wolfe. After I decided to tell you and made the appointment, I had the first good night's sleep I have had for a month. No one

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is going to shoot him. I want you to promise to tell the police, so *I* can't."

"I advise you not to insist on a promise."

"I must! I must *now!*"

"Very well." His shoulders went up a quarter of an inch and down again.

"You promise?"

"Yes."

She opened her bag, a large tan leather one, and took out a checkfold and a pen. "I would rather make it a check than cash," she said, "so it will be on record. Is a check all right?"

"Certainly."

"I mentioned a hundred dollars to Mr. Goodwin. Will that be enough?"

He said yes, and she wrote, resting the check on the side of the bag. To save her the trouble of getting up to hand it over I went and took it, but when she had closed the bag she arose anyway, and was turning to get her coat from the back of the chair when Wolfe spoke.

"Ten minutes of your half hour is left, Mrs. Hazen, if you have any use for it."

"No, thank you. I just realized that wasn't exactly the truth, what I told Mr. Goodwin, that I only wanted to tell you something. I wanted you to promise something too. I *do* thank you and I won't take—oh! You say I have ten minutes?" She glanced at her wrist. She turned to me. "I would love to see the orchids—just a quick look. If you would, Mr. Goodwin?"

"It will be a pleasure," I said, and meant it, but Wolfe was pushing back his chair. "Mr. Goodwin doesn't owe you the ten minutes, I do," he said. "Come with me. You won't need your coat."

He headed for the door. She gave me a glance with a suggestion of a smile, and followed him out. The sound came from the hall of the elevator door opening and closing.

I had no kick coming. The ten thousand orchids in the three plant rooms up on the roof of the old brownstone were his, not mine. He did like to show them off—so would you if they were yours—but that wasn't why he had intervened. He had some letters to dictate, and he thought that if I took her up to look at the orchids there was no telling when we would come back down. Years ago he decided, on insufficient evidence, that I forget about

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time when I am with an attractive young woman, and once he has decided something that settles it.

The phone rang. I got it at my desk and told it, "Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking." It was a man over in Jersey who makes sausage to Wolfe's specifications, wanting to know if we were ready for a shipment, and I switched it to Fritz in the kitchen. Thinking there was no better way for a licensed detective to fill idle time than by snooping, I picked up the mink coat for an inspection. When I saw that the label said Bergmann I decided that inspection would be superfluous and put it back on the chair.

I picked up the gun that she wasn't going to shoot her husband with. It was a Drexel .32, nice and clean, and the cylinder was full of cartridges, nothing for a lady with no permit to be toting around town. I inspected her check, East Side Bank and Trust Company, signed Lucy Hazen, and went and put it in the safe.

After glancing at my wrist watch, I turned on the radio for the noon news, and stood and stretched while I listened to it. Algeria was boiling. A building contractor on Staten Island denied that he had had favors from a politician. Fidel Castro was telling the Cuban people that the people who ran the United States government were a bunch of bums (my translation). Then:

"The body of a man named Barry Hazen was found this morning in an alley between two buildings on Norton Street in the lower West Side of Manhattan. He had been shot in the back and had been dead for some hours. No further details are available at present. Mr. Hazen was a well-known public-relations counselor. The Democratic leaders in Congress have apparently decided to center their fire—"

I turned it off.

I went and picked up the gun and smelled it, the barrel tip and the sides. That was silly but natural. When you would like to know if a gun has been fired recently you smell it automatically, but it doesn't mean a thing unless it has just been fired, say within thirty minutes, and there has been no opportunity to clean it.

I stood with it in my hand, looking at it, and then put it in a drawer of my desk. Her bag was there on the red leather chair, and I opened it and removed the contents. There were all the items you would expect a woman who wore Bergmann mink to have with her, but nothing more. I got the gun from the drawer,

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removed the cartridges, and examined them with a glass, to see if one of them, or maybe two, was brighter and newer than the others. They all looked alike.

As I was returning the gun to the drawer the sound came from the elevator descending, its thud at the bottom, and the door opening. They entered, Mrs. Hazen in front, and she crossed to the red leather chair, picked up her bag, turned to Wolfe's desk, and then turned to me.

"Where's the gun?" she asked. "I'm taking it."

"There has been a development, Mrs. Hazen." I was facing her at arm's length. "I turned on the radio for the news, and he said that—I'll repeat it verbatim. He said, 'The body of a man named Barry Hazen was found this morning in an alley between two buildings on Norton Street in the lower West Side of Manhattan. He had been shot in the back and had been dead for some hours. No further details are available at present. Mr. Hazen was a public-relations counselor.' That's what he said."

She was gawking at me. "You're m-m-m-m—" She started over. "You're making it up."

"No. That's what he said. Your husband has been shot dead."

The bag slipped from her hand to the floor and her face went white and stiff. I had seen people turn pale before, but I had never seen blood leave skin so thoroughly and so fast. She backed up an unsteady step, and I took her arm and eased her into the chair. Wolfe, who had stopped in the center of the room, snapped at me, "Get something. Brandy."

I moved, but she said, "Not for me. He said that?"

"Yes."

"He's dead. He's *dead?*"

"Yes."

She rammed her fists against her temples and pounded them. Wolfe said, "I'll be in the kitchen," and turned to go. To him a woman overwhelmed, no matter by what, is merely a woman having a fit, and it's too much for him. But I said, "Hold it, she'll be all right in a minute," and he came and looked down at her, let out a growl, went to his chair, and sat.

"I want to phone somebody," she said. "I have to *know*. Who can I phone?" Her fists were in her lap.

"A shot of brandy or whiskey wouldn't hurt," I told her.

"I don't want anything. Who can I phone?"

"Nobody." Wolfe was curt. "Not just now."

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Her head jerked to him. "Why not?"

"Because we must first consider whether *I* should phone—phone the police to report what you have told me. I promised to. Archie. Where's the gun?"

"In my desk drawer."

"Has it been fired recently?"

"No telling. If so it's been cleaned. It's fully loaded and the cartridges all look alike."

"Did she shoot him?"

That was routine; he merely wanted my opinion as a qualified expert on women. His over-all estimate of me and my relations with females is full of contradictions, but that doesn't bother him. "For a quick guess," I said, "no. To make it final I would need facts."

"So would I. Did you shoot your husband, Mrs. Hazen?"

She shook her head.

"I prefer to hear it if you can speak. Did you shoot him?"

"No." She had to push it out.

"Since my promise was to you, you may of course release me from it. Do you wish me to phone the police?"

"Not now." The blood was beginning to creep back into her skin. "You don't have to now. You won't ever have to. He's dead, and I didn't kill him." She rose to her feet, not very steady, but not staggering. "That's all over now."

"Sit down." It was a command. "It's not so simple. When the police ask you where you were this morning from eleven o'clock on what will you say? Confound it, quit propping yourself on my desk and sit down! That's better. What will you say?"

"Why. . ." She was on the edge of the chair. "Will they ask me that?"

"Certainly. Unless they already have the murderer and the evidence beyond all question, and that's too much to hope for. You will have to account for every minute since you last saw your husband. Did you come here in a cab?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll say so. You'll have to. And when they ask why you came to see me what will you say?"

She shook her head. She looked at me and back at him. "Oh," she said. "You'll have to tell me what to say."

He nodded. "I expected that." His head turned. "Archie. What ground have you for your guess?"

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I was back in my chair. "Partly personal," I told him, "and partly professional. Personal, my general impression of her, and specifically her smile when I let her in. Professional, two points. First, if she shot him last night after making an appointment with you and then came here with that jabber, she is either completely loony or the trickiest specimen I have ever laid eyes on, and I'll buy neither one. Second, and this is really it, her face when she realized he was dead. She might fake a faint or the staggers or even some fancy hysterics, but no woman alive could make her blood go like that. I said I would need facts to make it final, but I should have said I would need facts, and good ones, to make me guess again."

Wolfe grunted and turned to her with a scowl. "Granting that Mr. Goodwin's grounds are valid, what then? When the police learn that the widow of a man murdered last night came to see me this morning, they will harass me beyond tolerance. I owe you nothing. You are not my client. You have paid me a hundred dollars for half an hour of my time, now stretched to more than an hour, and released me from my promise, so that incident is closed. You asked me to tell you what to say when they ask you what you came here for, but they will also ask me. What if you fail to follow my advice and my account differs from yours? Why should I take that risk? I can see no alternative—What are you doing now?"

She had opened her bag and was taking out the checkfold and pen. "I'm going to write a check," she said. "Then I'll be your client. What shall I—how much?"

He nodded. "I expected that too. It won't do. I am not a blackmailer. I take pay for services, not for forbearance, and you may not need my services. If you do, we'll see. Will you answer some questions?"

"Of course. But I've taken more than my half an hour, and I owe you—"

"No. If you didn't shoot your husband we have both been snared by circumstance. First, instead of a question, a statement: you can't take the gun. The gun stays here. Now. When and where did—"

"But I'm going to put it back where I got it!"

"No. I accept Mr. Goodwin's guess as a hypothesis, but I can't let you take the gun. When and where did you last see your husband?"

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"Last night. At home. We had people for dinner."

"Details. How many people? Their names."

"They were clients of Barry's, important clients—all but one. Mrs. Victor Oliver. Anne Talbot, Mrs. Henry Lewis Talbot. Jules Khoury. Ambrose Perdis. Ted—Theodore Weed—he's not a client, he works for Barry. Seven, counting Barry and me."

"When did the guests leave?"

"I don't know exactly. Barry had told me he was going to discuss something with them, and I wouldn't be needed, and after the coffee I left. That's when I last saw him, there with them. I went upstairs to my bedroom."

"Did you hear him when he went up to bed?"

"No. There's a spare bedroom between his room and mine. And I was played out. I told you, I had the first good night's sleep I have had for a month."

"You didn't see him this morning?"

"No. He wasn't there. He rises early. The maid who—oh. Oh!"

"What?"

"Nothing—nothing that matters to you. I am not liking myself, Mr. Wolfe. I said he rises early, but now I can say he rose early, and I wanted to sing it. I did! No one is good enough to have a right to be glad that someone has died. The Lord knows I'm not. What if I never loved him? What if I married him because—"

Wolfe cut her off. "If you please. You'll have plenty of time for that. About the maid?"

She swallowed with her lips pressed tight. "I'm sorry. The maid who sleeps in and gets breakfast said he hadn't come down, and she had gone up and the door of his room was open and his bed hadn't been slept in. He had done that before, not very often, once or twice a month."

"Without telling you where he was going or, afterwards, where he had been?"

"Yes."

"Do you know or can you guess where he went last night, or with whom, or to whom?"

"No. I have no idea."

"I am still assuming that you didn't kill him, but how vulnerable are you? Were you continually in your house—it is a house, not an apartment?"

"Yes."

"Were you in it continually from the time you went to your

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bedroom last night until you left this morning?"

"Yes."

"Would the maid have heard you if you had gone out during the night? Sneaked out, and later in again?"

"I don't think so. Her room is in the basement."

Wolfe nodded. "You *are* vulnerable. What time did you leave this morning?"

"At five minutes past eleven. I wanted to be sure to get here on time."

"When did you take the gun from the drawer in your husband's room?"

"Just before I left. I didn't decide to bring it until the last minute."

"How many people know that you despised your husband?"

She gazed at him, not blinking, no reply.

" 'Despise' is your word, Mrs. Hazen. It is not adequate. No one kills a man, or wants to, merely because she despises him. But I'm not going into that. How many people know that you despised him?"

"I don't think anyone does." It was barely audible, and I have good ears. "I have never told anyone, not even my best friend. She may have suspected. I suppose she did."

"Pfui." Wolfe flipped a hand. "Your maid knows, for one, if she's not a dolt. She is of course being questioned at this moment. Was your husband wealthy?"

"I don't know. He had a large income, he must have, he was free with money. He owned the house."

"Any children?

"No."

"You will inherit?"

Her eyes flashed. "Mr. Wolfe, this is ridiculous! I don't *want* anything from him!"

"I am merely examining your position. You will inherit?"

"Yes. He told me I would."

"Didn't he know you despised him?"

"He was incapable of believing that anyone could despise him. I suppose he was a psychopath. I looked up psychopathy in the dictionary."

"No doubt that was a help." He looked up at the wall clock. "I presume you will now go home. Since you must tell the police that you were here you might as well say that you learned of your

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husband's death from my radio; it will save you the bother of feigning surprise and shock." He eyed her. "I said you would be in a pickle, and you are. When I am asked what you wanted of me, I shall say that you consulted me in confidence and I will reveal nothing of your conversation. It will be a little ticklish, but until and unless you are arrested on a charge of murder the pressure will not be intolerable. So you may tell them as much about your visit here, or as little, as you please."

She opened her bag. "I'm going to write a check. You must take it. You *must!*"

"No. You may not be in jeopardy. They may get the murderer today or tomorrow. If they do I may send you a bill for the extra hour; it will depend on my mood. If they don't, and you wish to engage my services, and Mr. Goodwin's guess has not been discredited, we'll see." He pushed his chair back and stood up.

She rose to her feet, steady this time, and I went and held her coat for her.

When I returned to the office after letting her out, Wolfe had straightened up in his chair to lean forward, and, with his head cocked, was sniffing the air. For a second I thought he was pretending that our ex-client had polluted the atmosphere with perfume, but then I realized that he was merely trying to catch an odor from the kitchen, where Fritz was baking scallops in shells—or probably, since I could catch the odor without sniffing, he was deciding whether Fritz had used only shallots in the sauce or had added an onion. By the time I got to my chair he had settled it; anyway, he turned to me.

"I do not intend," he stated, "to serve the convenience of a murderer. What about her face? I was at one side."

"One will get you fifty," I said. "You heard her stutter that I was m-m-making it up. Then when I said no, he had been shot dead and it hit her as a fact, she went white, all white, in three seconds. Maybe she can wiggle her ears, but she can't do that. No one can."

"Very well. Call Mr. Cohen and get details."

"Anything in particular?"

"Whatever he has, but I want to know if the weapon has been found, or a bullet."

"He would appreciate a major scoop, such as that the widow of the deceased visited the office of Nero Wolfe, this morning. Why not, since she's going to report it?"

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"Very well."

I got at the phone and dialed the number of the *Gazette,* and soon had Lon Cohen. When I tossed him the bone about Mrs. Hazen coming to see Wolfe, naturally he wanted the whole skeleton, not to mention meat, but I told him that would be all for now and how about some reciprocity? He obliged, and gave me the scrop, and I thanked him and hung up and turned to Wolfe.

"The body was found by a truck driver at ten eighteen a.m. It was stiff, so he must have been dead at least five hours and probably more. He was fully dressed, including an overcoat, and his hat was there on the ground. The usual items in his pockets, including a couple of dollars in change, except that there were no keys, and no wallet and no watch. Of course they could have been taken by someone who found him earlier and forgot to mention it. His name was on letters in his pocket, so the wallet wasn't taken to delay identification.

"Shot once, in the back, and a rib stopped the bullet and they have it. A thirty-two. Weapon not found. If the police have any leads or notions they're saving them, but of course it was found less than three hours ago." I glanced at my wrist. "Two hours and forty-nine minutes. Lon says he would have paid me five grand if I had kept Mrs. Hazen here until he could send a man to take her picture and ask her who shot her husband, and I told him I'll bear that in mind next time."

"They have the bullet."

"Right."

"When will a policeman come?"

"It will probably be Cramer in person. You know how he'll react when he learns she was here. Say two hours, possibly sooner."

"Will she report what she told me?"

"No."

A corner of his mouth twitched. "That's why I put up with you; you could have answered in fifty words and you did it in one."

"I've often wondered. Now tell me why I put up with you."

"That's beyond conjecture. I want a bullet that has been fired from that gun, and we shouldn't wait until after lunch. You have twenty minutes. If your guess about Mrs. Hazen is correct, that gun is not evidence, unless the murderer stole into that house afterwards, went to Mr. Hazen's room, returned the gun to the drawer, and slipped out again. If it *is* evidence you'll be tampering with it. Shall I do it?"

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"No. You might shoot a toe off." I got the gun from the drawer, removed one of the cartridges, unlocked and opened the drawer where we keep the Marleys for which we have permits, and got a .32 cartridge from the box. I put that cartridge in the Drexel where I had made room for it, turned the cylinder so it would be in firing position, went to the hall and downstairs to the storage room in the basement, switched the light on, and crossed to where a discarded mattress was doubled up on a table. I had used it for this operation before. I cocked the revolver, held it three inches from the mattress, and pulled the trigger.

You would suppose that all .32 cartridges would send a bullet the same distance into a mattress, the same mattress, but they don't. It took me a quarter of an hour to find it, and by the time I got back upstairs Wolfe was at table in the dining room, which is across the hall from the office. Before I joined him I removed the shell, returned the Drexel's own cartridge to its place, and put the gun in the safe and the bullet in an envelope in my desk drawer.

We were back in the office, Wolfe dictating and me taking, when company came. I had been right on both counts: it was Inspector Cramer in person, and it was 2:55 when the doorbell rang and I went to the hall for a look through the one-way glass panel in the front door, and there he was on the stoop, no sign of a sag in the heavy broad shoulders, the round red face framed by his turned-up overcoat collar and the brim of his gray felt which should have been retired long ago.

Since he had no appointment it would have been proper to open the door the two inches allowed by the chain bolt and greet him through the crack, but that always annoyed him, and if it turned out that I had tampered with evidence it wouldn't hurt to show him now that I had my good points. So I pulled the door wide open. Without even a nod, let alone a civil greeting, he crossed the sill, tramped down the hall into the office and on to Wolfe's desk, and demanded, "What time did Mrs. Barry Hazen get here this morning?"

Wolfe tilted his head back to look up at him and inquired, "Is that snow on your hat?"

Having entered and detoured around him, I too looked at the hat. There was nothing whatever on it except signs of age, and outdoors the sun was shining. It would fluster any man to have it put to him that one removes one's hat when one enters a house,

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but Cramer is ready for anything when he faces Wolfe. It didn't faze him. He merely barked, "I asked you a question!"

"Half-past eleven," Wolfe said.

"When did she leave?"

"Shortly before one o'clock."

Cramer took his overcoat off, ignored my offer to take it, put it on the arm of the red leather chair, and sat. "An hour and a half," he said, not barking but a little hoarse. He is always a little hoarse when he is dealing with Wolfe. "What did she have to say?" He hadn't touched the hat.

Wolfe swiveled and leaned back. "Mr. Cramer. I know that Mrs. Hazen's husband has been shot and killed. She was with me when the news came on my radio. I know that when I have been consulted by a person who is in any way connected with a death by violence you automatically assume that I have knowledge of evidence that would be useful in your investigation. Sometimes your assumption is valid; sometimes it isn't. This time it isn't; that is my considered opinion. Mrs. Hazen consulted me in confidence. If at any time I have reason to think that by refusing to disclose what she told me I am obstructing justice, I'll communicate with you."

Cramer got a cigar from a pocket, rolled it between his palms, stuck it in his mouth, and clamped his teeth on it. He does that instead of counting ten, when he knows that the words that are on his tongue would make things worse instead of better. He took the cigar from his mouth. "Someday," he said, "you're going to fall off and get hurt, and this could be it. If and when you find it gets too hot to hang onto it any longer, and you turn loose, and you have obstructed justice by not telling me now, I'll get your hide. Nothing and no one will stop me. I'm asking you to tell me what Mrs. Barry Hazen said when she came to see you nine hours after her husband was murdered."

Wolfe shook his head. "I decline to tell you because I believe, as matters stand now, that it is not pertinent to your inquiry. Should I have occasion to change my mind—and by the way, I can offer you an opportunity to change it for me. Archie, where's that bullet?"

I got the envelope from my drawer, took the bullet out, and handed it to him. Cramer's sharp gray eyes were on me and followed the bullet back to Wolfe. Wolfe took it in his fingers, barely glanced at it, handed it back to me, and said, "Give it to Mr.

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Cramer." As I did so he turned to Cramer. "This will be pointless if you have found the weapon that was used to shoot Mr. Hazen. Have you?"

"No."

"It will also be pointless if you have not found the bullet that killed him. Have you?"

"Yes."

"Then I suggest that you have your laboratory compare that bullet with it. If you find that they were shot by the same gun let me know at once and I'll have some information for you. I would want to see the laboratory report, certified."

"You would." Cramer's eyes were slits and his lips tightened. "Where did you get this bullet?"

"I'll tell you, or I won't, when I get your report."

"By God." Cramer was hoarser. "This *is* pertinent. This is evidence. I'll take you down, both of you—"

"Nonsense. Evidence of what? I don't know and neither do you. If it wasn't fired by the gun that killed Mr. Hazen it is evidence of nothing, and I am not obliged to account for it until I know. I'm not indulging in a prank, Mr. Cramer. There is possibility that the bullets will match, and if so it will indeed be evidence. Let me know."

Cramer opened his mouth to say something, vetoed it, got to his feet, put the bullet in his pocket, threw the cigar at my wastebasket and missed, picked up his coat and put it on, ignoring my offer to help, and marched out. I went to the hall to see that when the door shut he was on the outside.

When I returned to the office Wolfe growled. "Confound these interruptions. We have forty minutes. Where were we on that letter to Mr. Hewitt?" I sat, got my notebook, and told him.

At four o'clock, when he left to go up to the plant rooms for his two-hour afternoon session with the orchids, I got busy at the typewriter. On various occasions I have had a little trouble turning out perfect letters to orchid collectors and providers of food specialties when my mind had other interests and concerns, and that day was one of the worst.

Cramer had left at 3:20. He would lose no time getting the bullet to the laboratory; they probably had it by 3:50, or four o'clock at the latest. Examining two bullets with a comparison microscope is a simple chore; ten minutes is ample to decide if they were fired by the same gun. 4:10. Allow a quarter of an hour for writ-

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ing the report, which wouldn't have to be in shape for a judge and jury. 4:25. Cramer would have a man there waiting for it. He should phone by 4:30, or ring the doorbell by 4:45. He didn't.

By 5:15 I had to keep my jaw set to hit the right keys. If you think I was keyed up more than the circumstances warranted, look it over. If the bullets matched I was a sap. It was a million to one that the murderer hadn't sneaked into the house to put the gun back in the drawer in Hazen's room; why would he? Murderers often do crazy things, but not that crazy. Therefore Mrs. Hazen had lied, and she had either killed him or knew who did, and I was a beetlehead. I had to do three of the letters twice.

By six o'clock, when Wolfe came down from the plant rooms, I had begun to relax. He went to his desk and started on the letters I had put there, which he always reads with care. After he had finished a couple and signed them I remarked, "Of course Cramer wouldn't bother to phone if the bullets didn't match."

He grunted.

"And the laboratory got it more than two hours ago, so we might as well—"

The doorbell rang, and the bottom of my spine curled. Cramer had waited until six o'clock, when he knew Wolfe would be available. I went to the hall and switched the stoop light on, and my spine went back to normal. It was a stranger, a man about my age, maybe a little younger, with no hat and a mop of brown hair shuffled by the wind.

I had never been so delighted to see a stranger, but had it under control by the time I got to the door and opened it and said, "Yes, sir?"

"I want to see Nero Wolfe. My name's Weed, Theodore Weed."

I should have had him wait there while I went and told Wolfe. That was the routine, but I was so glad to see him that I invited him in and helped him off with his coat. Then I went to the office and announced, "Theodore Weed to see you. One of the dinner guests. The one who—"

"What does he want?"

He knew damn well I hadn't had time to ask what he wanted. I said, "You."

"No. I've been pestered enough on a matter in which I have no interest. Tell him so and don't—"

Weed was there. He crossed to the red leather chair, sat in it, and said, "I'm not going to pester you. I'm going to hire you."

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Wolfe glared at me. I had let a man in without consulting him; he would have something to say about that when we were alone. Weed was going on. "I know you come high, but I pay my bills. Do you want a retainer?"

Wolfe had transferred the glare to him. "No. You not only intrude, you presume. Archie, show him the door."

"Now wait a minute. I'm not very. . ." He let it hang and started to work his jaw. He had plenty of jaw, a little bony but not out of proportion. He got it under control. "All right, I started wrong. I'll try again. Mrs. Barry Hazen came to see you this morning and left a gun with you. Where is it?"

"Intrusion and presumption," Wolfe said, "and now effrontery. I must insist—"

"Damn it, I know she did! She told me so! She was here when she heard about it, that they had found his body! And she wanted to hire you, she wanted to give you a check, and you wouldn't take it!"

He paused to control his jaw. "So I want to hire you, and I'll pay your bill. I just left the District Attorney's office and she's still there. They wouldn't let me see her, but she's there and they're going to charge her with murder. I can't see why it's presumption for me to want to hire you—you're in the detective business and my money is as good as anybody's. All right, I got ahead of myself asking you about the gun, but when I'm your client there's no reason why you shouldn't tell me where it is."

He stuck a hand in his pocket and brought out a wad of bills, not a thick one, and unfolded it.

I was trying to decide. Either he thought that Lucy Hazen had killed her husband and was being chivalrous, or he didn't think she had but was selling Wolfe the idea that he did think so. Whichever it was, he was willing to spend money on it, for he got up from his chair to put the bills on Wolfe's desk.

As Wolfe started to speak the phone rang, and I turned and got it. It was Lucy Hazen. She asked for Wolfe, and I told her to hold it and turned to him. "The woman that brought the sausage this morning wants to know if it will do. If you want to ask Fritz you can talk on the kitchen extension."

He got up and went, and I held on. In a moment his voice was in my ear. "This is Nero Wolfe, Mrs. Hazen?"

"Yes. You said this morning that if I need your services you would see. I do need them. I'm going to be arrested, and I—"

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"Where are you?"

"At the District Attorney's. I don't know any—"

"Say only what you must say on the telephone."

"I'm in a booth with the door closed."

"Pfui. It is probably not only heard but also recorded. Say only what you must."

"All right." A little pause. "He said I could phone a lawyer, and I don't know any except my husband's, and I don't want him. Will you get one for me?"

"I'll send one to you. After speaking with him you can decide whether to engage him."

"I will. Of course. But I want to engage you too. You said you would if I needed you."

"I said I would see." A pause, longer than hers. If he committed himself he would have to work, and he would rather eat than work. "Very well." He growled it. "I am engaged. One question: have you disclosed any of your conversation with me? Yes or no."

"No."

"Satisfactory. One instruction: if you have an intention to reject property left you by your husband you will neither declare it nor indicate it. You're going to have some bills to pay."

"But I don't want anything from him! I told you—"

"We're on the phone. The lawyer will join me in that instruction. His name is Nathaniel Parker. Archie, get Mr. Parker. I'll talk from here."

I pushed the button down, released it, dialed Parker's home number, got him, buzzed the kitchen, and Wolfe got on. He gave Parker the necessary facts, and not much more—nothing of what Mrs. Hazen had told us that morning, nothing about the gun. He did say that I had formed the conclusion that she had not shot her husband, and that he had accepted it.

Parker was to arrange for bail if she was bailable; if they held her on the big charge he was to get what he could at the D.A.'s office. I waited to hang up until Wolfe was at the office door. He went to his desk, sat, leveled his eyes at Theodore Weed, and spoke.

"Now, sir. That was timely. It was Mrs. Hazen on the phone. I have sent—"

"Where is she?"

"At the District Attorney's office. She thinks she is going to be held. I have sent a lawyer to her and I have agreed to act in her

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behalf. You were assuming that I declined her offer of a check because I thought she was guilty of murder or at least was implicated, but you were wrong. She is now my client." He wiggled a finger at the bills on the desk. "Your money. Take it."

Weed's jaw was hanging, his lips parted. He found words. "But you— I don't see why you—"

"You're not obliged to see and I'm not obliged to explain. Why do you think Mrs. Hazen killed her husband? Was it merely surmise?"

"I don't— I don't think she killed him. She didn't!"

"If I had taken your money what were you going to ask me to do?"

"I don't know exactly. I was going to consult you. I wanted to know what you did with the gun. Have the police got it?"

Wolfe shook his head. "I am acting for her now, Mr. Weed. You are the enemy—one of them. What if you killed Mr. Hazen, or know who did, and would like to see it imputed to her, and suspecting, for whatever reason, that she left a gun with me this morning, you want to find out? What if you are indeed the enemy?"

Weed sat and stared at him. His jaw started to work again and he stopped it. "Look here," he said. "I want to know something. I know your reputation, I know about you. Is that straight, Mrs. Hazen phoned you just now and you're working for her?"

"It is."

"All right, then this is straight too." He stuck an arm out. "You can cut off this arm if it will help her any. And the other one. If that's corny, okay, that's where I stand."

Wolfe regarded him with narrowed eyes. So did I. He looked as if he meant it, but even if he did, that didn't make him our pal. If he would give an arm to help her, and if he had known how she felt about her husband, he might have taken steps to get rid of him for her, which wouldn't cost him even a finger if he was lucky.

Wolfe made a tent with his fingers, his elbows on the chair arms. He said, "I have no use for your arm, but some information might be helpful. When did you last see Mr. Hazen?"

"I want to know where that gun is. I know she left it here, she told me so."

"When did she tell you?"

"This afternoon. I was there when she came home."

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"What else did she tell you?"

"Not much—there wasn't time. We were interrupted. I knew Hazen had a gun in a drawer in his room, and I had looked to see if it was there and it wasn't, and I asked her if she knew where it was. Have the police got it?"

"No. I'll indulge you further, Mr. Weed. The bullet that killed Mr. Hazen wasn't fired by that gun. If you already knew that it's no news for you; if you didn't, it should relieve—"

"How do you know it wasn't?"

"Enough for you that I do. Now you indulge me. When did you last see Mr. Hazen?"

"This morning. At the morgue. I went there to identify him, by request. Alive, I saw him last at his house, last night."

"At what hour?"

"Around half-past nine. Five or ten minutes either way. The police wanted it more exact, but that's as close as I can come."

"The circumstances?"

"There were people there for dinner. Do you want their names?"

"Yes."

"They were clients of Hazen's. Mrs. Victor Oliver, a widow. Mrs. Henry Lewis Talbot, the wife of the banker. Ambrose Perdis, the shipping tycoon. Jules Khoury, the inventor. And Mr. and Mrs. Hazen and me. Seven. After dinner Hazen told Lucy—his wife—that we were going to discuss a business matter and she left. I left soon after that, and that was the last I saw him alive, there with them."

"How did you spend the next six hours?"

"I walked to the Overseas Press Club—it's a short walk—and was there until around midnight, then I went home and went to bed. And stayed in bed."

"You were associated with Mr. Hazen in his business?"

"I was in his employ."

"In what capacity?"

"Mostly I write stuff. Handouts, plugs, the usual junk. Also I was supposed to use my contacts. I was a newspaperman when Hazen hired me a little more than a year ago."

"If they were going to discuss a business matter why did you leave?"

"I wasn't needed. Or wanted."

"Then why were you there at all?"

Weed put his hands on the chair arms, levered his fanny up,

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settled farther back, and took a breath. He rubbed the chair arms with his palms. "You don't think Lucy killed him," he said. "Or you wouldn't be working for her. But even if she didn't she's in one hell of a jam. If you're half as good as you're supposed to be . . .I don't know. Maybe I ought to give you a different answer than the one I gave the District Attorney when he asked why I was there. The right answer. Even if it makes you think *I* killed him. I didn't."

"If you did, Mr. Weed, you're doomed in any case, no matter what answers you give."

"Okay, then here's why I was there. Exclusive for you. Hazen liked to have me in the same room with his wife because he knew how I felt about her. God only knows how he knew. I certainly tried not to show it and I thought I did pretty well, and I'm sure she doesn't know, but he did. He was a remarkable man. He had a sixth sense about people, and maybe a seventh and an eighth. But he also had blind spots. He actually didn't know how his wife felt about him, or if he did he was even more remarkable than I thought."

"Did you know?"

"Of course."

"She told you?"

"My God, no. I doubt if she even told her best friend. Don't think that the way I feel about her made me imagine it. I saw her when he touched her, how she tried to cover up. So that's why I was invited to dinner last night. I don't think he expected or hoped to see me squirm; he didn't have to, he knew how I felt. Of course he was a sadist, but he was a damned subtle one. I was onto him, in a way, after I had been with him a couple of months, but I didn't leave because I. . .I had met her."

"And your feeling for her was returned?"

"Certainly not. I was just a guy who worked for her husband."

"Rather a forlorn situation for you."

"Yeah. That's the right word, forlorn. I told you because you asked why I was there, and I've got a little idea how you work, and you're working for her. Another thing you might want to know: I think there was something screwy about his business. I know the public-relations game is mostly just a high-grade racket, but even so.

"Take the four people who were there last night. Why did Mrs. Victor Oliver, the sixty-year-old widow of a millionaire broker,

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pay him two thousand dollars a month? She needs public relations like I need a hole in the head. The same for Mrs. Talbot—twenty-five hundred a month. Maybe her husband, the banker, could use a P.R. expert, granted that there is one, but why her? Jules Khoury's amounts vary, sometimes a couple of thousand, sometimes more. Possibly an inventor likes to stand in well with the public, though I don't see why, and during the time I've been there Khoury has got damn little for his money.

"Ambrose Perdis is the screwiest of all. For his business, his shipping corporations, he uses one of the big P.R. operators, Codray Associates; but personally he has paid Hazen more than forty thousand dollars this past year. I'm not supposed to know all this. I got curious and looked at the records one day."

Wolfe grunted. "A man who hires another man to forge distinction for him deserves as little as he gets. Are you suggesting that Mr. Hazen extorted those sums?"

"I don't know, but he didn't earn them. I admit that very few P.R. operators do earn what they get. If any."

"Did he have any clients other than those four?"

"Sure, about a dozen. Fifteen altogether, as of yesterday. His total take was over a quarter of a million a year."

Wolfe looked up at the clock. "It will be my dinner time in five minutes. If my assumption that Mrs. Hazen didn't kill her husband is correct, and if you didn't, who did?"

That question gets a helpful answer about once in a hundred times. It was obvious that Weed had given it no brain room at all before he rang our doorbell, because he had either thought that Lucy had done it or known that he had, so he had no guesses ready. He was more than willing; the idea appealed to him; but he had to start from scratch, and five minutes wasn't enough.

He thought that Wolfe should forget about dinner, though he didn't say so, which was just as well. He said he would return after dinner, but Wolfe said no, if he would leave his phone number he would hear from us. He would have left the bills there on Wolfe's desk if I hadn't handed them to him.

By the time we had finished dinner and were back in the office, with coffee, I had no personal worry. If the bullets had matched we would have heard from Cramer by then. Wolfe got at the letters to sign, still on his desk, and as he finished the last one and I took it he spoke. "Did Mr. Weed shoot him?"

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"No comment. I'd have to flip a coin. He cleared up one point, anyway, about her. You said that no one wants to kill a man merely because she despises him. Sure. So what was eating her? Weed. He says she doesn't know how he feels about her and the feeling is not returned. Nuts. Either he lies or he's simple. Of the ten thousand women I have fallen in love with, every single one of them knew it before I did. As for Weed shooting him, I am split. It would be tough to send her a bill for nailing him, but if he didn't you've got a job. Where do you start? Apparently Hazen was the kind of specimen—"

The doorbell rang. Could Cramer possibly have held off so long? No. It would be Weed, to help some more. No. It was a more familiar figure, a tall thin middle-aged man in a dark gray overcoat that had been cut to give him more shoulder, but not overdoing it. Nathaniel Parker had his clothes made by Stover.

When I opened the door and greeted and admitted him he headed for the office, keeping his coat on and his homburg in his hand, and I followed.

He was one of the eight men, not counting me, that Wolfe shook hands with. He declined Wolfe's invitation to be seated, saying that he was an hour and a half late for a dinner appointment. "I stopped in instead of phoning," he said, "because I had to deliver this." He took a key from his pocket and handed it to me. "That's the key to Mrs. Hazen's house. Also this."

From his inside pocket he took a folded paper. "That's authority from her to enter and get something. What you're to get, if you want to, is an iron box—she said iron but I suppose it's tin or steel—that is under the bottom drawer of the chest in Hazen's bedroom. You remove the drawer and pry up the board that it slides in on, and the box is underneath. She doesn't know what's in it. One day about a year ago Hazen lifted the board and showed her the box, and told her that if he died she was to get the box, have it opened by a locksmith, and burn the contents without looking at them. I thought you might want to have a look, and she is willing. You'll be acting for her, through her attorney."

Wolfe grunted. "I'll use my discretion."

"I know you will. If you don't want to tell me what was in it you'll say it was empty. I'd like to be present when it's opened, but I have an appointment. As for her, what did she tell you this morning?"

"Ask her."

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"I did. She wouldn't tell me. She said she would disclose it only if you told her to. If she is charged with homicide I'll want to know that or I'll step out. She has been there more than five hours and they'll probably keep her another five. If she is held as a material witness I can do nothing about bail until morning. I have an appointment with Hazen's lawyer at nine thirty. He has the will. Anything else now?"

Wolfe said no, and he went. I escorted him out, returned to the office and asked, "Any special instructions?"

"No. Will the police be there?"

"I shouldn't think so. It's only where he lived—he wasn't shot there. Do I wear gloves?"

"No. You have her authority."

Ever since a difficulty I got into some years ago I have made it a practice to have a gun along when I am on an errand that may interfere with a murderer's program. I took off my jacket, got a shoulder hoster and a Marley, which I loaded, from the drawer, put them where they belonged, put the jacket back on, checked that Lucy's key was in one pocket and her authority in another, and went out.

I stood across the street from the Hazen house, on 37th Street between Park and Lexington, for a look. It was brick, painted gray with green trim, four stories, narrower than Wolfe's brownstone, with the entrance three steps down from the sidewalk. I noted those details just for the record, but they weren't important. What was important was that there was a tiny sliver of light at the lower part of the right edge of one of the three windows on the third floor—a sliver that you might leave if you weren't quite thorough enough when you arrange a drape.

I didn't know where Hazen's room was; that could be it. It could be a Homicide man looking things over, but it wasn't probable; they had had ten hours. It could be the maid who slept in, but why, at 9:30 at night? Her room certainly wasn't third floor front. Whoever it was and whatever he was doing, I decided not to interrupt him by ringing.

I crossed over, descended the three steps, used the key, opened the door with care, entered, closed it with more care, and stood and listened while my eyes adjusted to the dark. For half a minute there was no sound from any direction; then there was something like a bump from up above, followed by a voice, male, very

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faint. Unless he was talking to himself there was more than one. Thinking there might be occasion for activity, I took off my overcoat and put it on the floor, and my hat, and then tiptoed along the hall, feeling my way, found the stairs, and started up.

Halfway up I stopped. Had there been another voice, a soprano? There had. There was. Then the baritone again. I went on up, with more care now and slower, keeping to the end of the steps next the wall. In the hall on the second floor there was a little light coming from above, enough to catch outlines. Up the second flight I went even slower, since each step might bring me within range. The voices had stopped, but there were tapping sounds.

On the fourth step I could get my eyes to the level of the floor by stretching. The hall was the same as the floor below, and the light was coming from a half-open door at its front end. All I could see inside was a chair and part of a bed and drapes over a window, and the back of a woman's head over the back of the chair, silvery hair under a black pancake hat.

I might have stayed put until the voice came again, and now I could get words, but a staircase is not a good tactical position. The light was on them, not me, and at the top I would be nearly out of range through the opening. I moved. As I put my weight on the next to last step the tapping stopped and the baritone came.

"There's no sense in this." I made the landing and across to the wall. The soprano came. "There certainly isn't, Mr. Khoury." I started along the wall toward the door. Another female voice came, pitched lower. "I don't think it's here. It could be in Lucy's room, that would be like him." Then another man's voice, a deeper one. "All right, we'll try it," and the door swung wide and the man was there, on the move.

I'm not proud of the next two seconds. I was alerted and he wasn't, and I think I am fairly fast. My excuse is that I was in the middle of a careful step, putting my toe down, but anyway he was at me before I was set, and he damn near toppled me. When you're thrown off balance by impact you only make it worse if you try to get purchase on your way down, so I let myself go, brought my knees up to my chin as I hit the floor, rolled to get my feet at his middle, and let him have it.

He was plenty heavy, but it tore him loose and sent him bouncing off the wall. As I sprang to my feet another man was through the door and coming. I sidestepped and ducked, jerking my right back, and hooked him in the kidney. He doubled up and hugged

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himself, and I kept going to the corner, whirled, had the Marley in my hand, and showed it.

"Come right ahead," I said, "if you want your skull cracked."

The first man, the heavy one, was propped against the wall, panting. The smaller one was trying to straighten up. There was a woman in the doorway, the one who had been in the chair, and another one behind her.

"Also," I said, "this thing is loaded, so don't try reaching for a cigarette. Inside, everybody, and take it easy. I would prefer to get you in the shoulder or leg, but I'm not a very good shot."

The heavy man said, "Who are you?"

"Billy the Kid. Come on, into the room, and no gymnastics. Go to the far side and face the wall."

They moved. As they approached the door the women backed off, and they entered and I followed. The woman with silvery hair started to chatter at me, but I wiggled the gun and told her to go to the wall. When they were there I went over the men from behind, felt no weapons, told them to stay put, and sidestepped to the bed. There were coats and hats on it, and the women's bags.

I had the men tagged; the husky one was Ambrose Perdis, the shipping magnate, whose picture I had seen here and there, and I had heard the other one called Khoury; but I needed introductions to the women. As I opened one of the bags and dumped its contents on the bed Perdis turned around and I spoke. "Hold it. I'm giving you a break. Shall I come and slap you with the gun? Turn around."

He turned. A leather case from the bag was stuffed with credentials—driver's license, credit cards, others. Some of them said Anne Talbot and others Mrs. Henry Lewis Talbot. That was the young woman, whose attractions, both from the front and the rear, were so obvious that they had caught my eye even though my eyes were busy.

There was a leather keyfold and I snapped it open to inspect the keys, and compared one of them with the key to the house which I had in my pocket. It didn't match.

I returned the items to the bag one by one and picked up the other bag and dumped it. The woman with silvery hair was Mrs. Victor Oliver. There was no key in her bag like the one I had, and nothing of interest. I examined the pockets of the coats, all four of them, and found no key.

As I stepped around the end of the bed I allowed myself a grin

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at a detail I had observed: they all had gloves on—not rubber ones secured for the occasion, just gloves.

"Now that I know your names," I said, "it's only fair that you should know mine. Archie Goodwin. I work for a man you may have heard of, Nero Wolfe, the private detective. He has been hired by Mrs. Barry Hazen, and I have her key to the house and her written authority to enter. I need to know which one of you has a key and I'm going to find out. You may turn around, but stay where you are. You will take off your clothes and pile them on the floor, including your shoes and socks or stockings, but I think not your underwear. I'll see."

They were facing me at four paces. Anne Talbot said, "I won't. It's outrageous." She was extremely easy to look at.

"Pooh," I said. "Pretend you're at the beach or a pool. Do you want me to peel you? Don't think I wouldn't."

"We have no key," Mrs. Oliver said. She was easy to look away from, with her flabby jowl and little yellow eyes set deep. "The maid let us in. She has gone out, but when she comes back you can ask her."

"She'll deny it," Jules Khoury said. He was the baritone, a swarthy specimen.

"Look," I said, "you're four to one. If you make me do it the hard way it will be rough. I'll give you two minutes to get your clothes off." I raised my wrist to see my watch without dropping my eyes. "Start with the gloves. I want them too."

"Is this necessary?" Perdis demanded. "Is it so important how we got in?"

"Yes. There were no keys in Hazen's pockets. Twenty seconds gone."

I am enough of a gentleman to turn my back or at least avert my eyes when a lady is undressing, but one of those ladies might possibly have had a gun on her leg, so I forgot my manners. It took the men twice as long as the women. I decided to let Anne Talbot keep her bra and panties; she would have had no reason to bury the key as deep as that.

Mrs. Oliver's girdle was so tight she couldn't have slipped a key inside even if she had tried. Khoury had jockeys, no undershirt. Perdis had a baby-blue silk altogether, to the knees. I had them turn around, and then used a foot to rake Perdis' pile across the rug, out of range of a kick.

It took longer than it should on account of the gun in my hand,

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and of course I not only looked for the key but for any other item that might be helpful. No soap. Khoury had a keyfold and Perdis a keyring, but no soap. It wasn't much of a letdown because I had expected it when they all shed and turned their backs. If one of them had had Hazen's key he would either have tried to ditch it or produced it and tried to explain it.

Now that I was certain none of them had a cannon or a bomb I could relax a little. I told them to dress, went to the stand at the head of the bed, lifted the receiver from the phone, and was dialing a number when Perdis' voice came.

"Wait a minute! One minute!" He had a touch of accent. "I have something to say. You are calling the police?"

"No." I cradled the receiver. "Say it fast and short."

He was handicapped for man-to-man talk, with his shirt on but his pants in his hands. "You are not a policeman," he said.

"No. I told you who I am."

"He's Archie Goodwin," Anne Talbot said. "I've seen him at the Flamingo."

"You are a private detective," Perdis said.

"Right."

"Then you do things for money. We will pay you fifty thousand dollars if you will leave this house and forget that you have been here. Half of it in cash tomorrow morning and the other half later. We will give you a satisfactory guarantee, perhaps something in writing."

"How much later?"

"That's hard to say. It is delicate. We would need to be sure of your forgetting until certain difficulties have ended."

"That's pretty vague. Get your clothes on and we'll see." I picked up the phone and dialed, and he started toward me. I showed the gun, but he kept coming, saying something, and I dropped the phone and moved to meet him, and damned if he didn't swerve around me and dart for the phone.

I had intended to tap him with the gun, not caring for bruised knuckles, but his swerve got him on the wrong side, so I took him from behind, with my left arm hooked under his chin and my hip at his rump, and levered him up and over. He landed on his hands and knees nine feet away. I said, "Cut out the horseplay and put your pants on," and went to the phone and dialed.

After nine buzzes Wolfe's voice came. "Yes?"

"Me. Could we use fifty grand?"

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A grunt. "In the box?"

"No. I haven't got it yet. I'm in Hazen's bedroom. There are four people with me, two men and two women, lined up against the wall. The four that came to dinner last night. They were in this room looking for something and hadn't found it. Perdis just off—"

"One of them has Hazen's key."

"No. I had them strip and went through their clothes. They say the maid let them in. She's not here; of course they greased her. Perdis just offered me fifty grand to go away and forget I was here. I'll split it with you. He would probably double it."

"Pfui. Are you intact?"

"Sure. I'm calling just to tell you to expect us, say in half an hour, maybe less."

Silence. He would have to work, not tomorrow, but now—and two women. Then: "I suppose I must," and he hung up.

Perdis had joined the others at the wall. As I cradled the phone he spoke. "We will double it. One hundred thousand dollars."

"Skip it." I moved to the foot of the bed. "What would I tell my wife if I had one? You heard me tell Nero Wolfe to expect us in half an hour, but you have a choice. You can leave and go your ways and try to forget you were here, and I'll phone Inspector Cramer and report this incident, omitting nothing. Or you can come and talk it over with Nero Wolfe, and he may or may not care to bother Cramer about it. You may have two minutes to consider it." I looked at my wrist.

"Listen, Mr. Goodwin," Anne Talbot said. She had her clothes on, and with or without them she was highly ornamental. "We were looking for something that belongs to us. We're not thieves. We're respectable—"

I cut her off. "Sorry, but don't waste it on me. I just run errands. It's either Nero Wolfe or the police. If you pick Nero Wolfe there will be a slight delay because I have a little chore to do in this room. You will take your things and go downstairs and on out, and get two taxis. You will get into one of the taxis and wait there in front of the house, and have the other one there for me. I'll be down soon, probably in a couple of minutes. There's one complication: if you split and one or two of you prefer to go somewhere else, I'll phone the police immediately. I would rather not, but I'd have to."

Two of them, Perdis and Mrs. Oliver, started to speak, but I shut them off and moved away from the bed. Anne Talbot went to

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he bed and got her coat, and Khoury held it for her, then got his wn. Anne Talbot said to Perdis and Mrs. Oliver, "Is there any lternative?" Perdis got Mrs. Oliver's coat and took it to her, and he went to the bed for her bag.

Perdis was the last one out. When he had started down the tair I shut the door, put a chair against it, went to the chest of lrawers, a big heavy piece at the left wall, and took out the bot-om drawer. There was a folded blanket in it. I squatted at the pening.

The board that the drawer slid on, solid, not a plywood panel, vas flush and snugly fitted, no play to it. I tried to get its edge vith my thumbnails; nothing doing. I got out my pocketknife, tuck the point of the blade in the crack at the center, just barely n, pried gently, and up it came. The front edge of the board was eveled. Very neat. I put my hand in, felt metal, got a finger nder, and here came the box.

It was steel, anything but flimsy, twelve inches by six and bout two inches deep, and weighed a good four pounds, with a ock not to be opened with a nail file. I shook it and heard no novement, which didn't prove anything. With the board down, I eplaced the drawer, moved the chair away from the door and pened it, and went to the head of the stairs. No sound of voices rom below. If I had gone down and joined them in the hall carry-ng a steel box which I must have found in Hazen's room they vould have made quite a party of it.

I descended a flight, stood to listen half a minute, and went on lown. They had turned on the light in the lower hall. My hat and oat were there on the floor. I put the Marley in the hoster, put n the hat and coat, slipped the box under the coat, with my hand n my pocket holding it, turned out the light, and opened the door.

They had followed instructions to a T. Two taxis were there, nd they were in the one in the rear, all four of them. After lancing in I told the driver to follow my taxi, went and got in nd gave the driver the address, and we rolled.

When you mount the seven steps to the stoop and enter the hall f the old brownstone on West 35th Street, the first door on your eft is to what we call the front room, with the office door farther long on that side. The walls and doors of the front room and ffice are soundproofed. After convoying the company to the front oom and telling them they wouldn't have to wait long, I returned

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to the hall, put my hat and coat on the rack, proceeded to th office, and put the box on Wolfe's desk pad.

"Good timing," I said. "In another hour or two they would prob ably have found it."

He reached to pass his fingertips along its edge. "You haven' opened it."

"No. It's a good lock. They're in the front room, all four. I gav them their pick, you or the cops, and they preferred you. There' nothing to add to what I told you on the phone. Before I open it want to register a guess. Not that it's what Hazen had on them that's a cinch. My guess is specifically what he had on Mrs Oliver. She murdered her husband. Wait till you see her."

He made a face. "This will be distasteful. Bring keys."

I went to the cabinet at the far wall, opened a drawer, anc made selections. Although I couldn't qualify on the witness stanc as a lock expert, I know a Hotchkiss from a Euler, and I can oper your suitcase with a paper clip if you'll be patient. Moving the box to my desk, I sat and started in. I had selected four types, lit tle boxes of assortments. In three minutes I eliminated the firs type, and in another three the second one. The third seemed more promising, and I was getting hot when Wolfe growled, "Get a hammer and screwdriver."

As he spoke it clicked and I had it. I raised the lid. The box was empty. I upended it for Wolfe to see. "Yeah," I said. "It sure is distasteful."

He took in air, about a bushel, and let it out again. "It's just as well. It would probably have presented us with a problem. More than one. I presume he decided it was a mistake to tell his wife o it and removed the contents. Elsewhere in the house?"

"I doubt it."

"So do I." He leaned back, closed his eyes, and pushed his lips out. In a moment he pulled them in, and then out and in, out anc in. He was working. A minute passed, two minutes, three. . .He opened his eyes and straightened up. "Lock the box and leave it on your desk. Put the keys away. Have a gun in your hand when you admit them, and go to your desk and stay there. Proceed."

I proceeded. After locking the box and returning the keys to the cabinet, I moved four of the yellow chairs up, in a row facing Wolfe's desk, got the gun out, opened the door to the front room and invited them to enter. The gentlemen followed the ladies. I went to my desk and pronounced names, and when they were seat-

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ed I sat, with the gun in my hand resting on my thigh.

Wolfe's eyes went right and then left. "This shouldn't take long," he said. "First the situation. I shall not resort to euphemism. You were being blackmailed by Mr. Hazen, either collectively—please don't interrupt. Either collectively or separately. He had other victims, but you four alone were paying him around a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, ostensibly for professional services, but that was merely a subterfuge. I don't know whether the police know that or not, probably not, but I do. If there was any doubt, it was removed when Mr. Goodwin found you in that house surreptitiously, looking for something, and you offered him a large sum of money. So much—"

"I didn't," Mrs. Oliver blurted. "Mr. Perdis did."

"Pfui. You were there. Did you object? So much for that. I am acting for my client, Mrs. Hazen. She is being held under suspicion of killing her husband, and has given me certain information. This is one item: one day about a year ago her husband showed her a box, a metal box, he had in his bedroom. To show it to her he removed the bottom drawer of a chest and pried up the board the drawer slid on, and the box was underneath the board.

"He told her that if he died she should get the box, have it opened by a locksmith, and burn the contents without looking at them. It was to get that box that Mr. Goodwin went there this evening, with Mrs. Hazen's key and authority. After you left the room he removed the drawer and lifted the board, and got it. It's there on his desk."

That was like him. I hadn't told him that I had sent them from the room before I got it, and that they hadn't seen it; he took it for granted. I appreciate his compliments, but some day he may overestimate me. I had no idea where or what he was headed for, but I thought a little gesture wouldn't hurt, so I got the box with my left hand, the gun being in my right, and displayed it.

Four pairs of eyes were on it, glued to it. Anne Talbot mumbled something. Perdis started up, thought better of it, and sank back. Jules Khoury muttered, "So it was there." I had the gun, but there were four of them, so I got up, detoured around them to the safe, opened the safe door, put the box in, closed the door, and spun the knob. As I returned to my chair Wolfe was speaking:

"I have a proposal to make, but first a question or two. My objective, of course, is to demonstrate that Mrs. Hazen did not kill her husband. Yesterday evening you dined at her table. After din-

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ner she went to her room, and soon after that Mr. Weed left. I'm not going to ask about the sequence and the times of your departures, or where you went and what you did, the police have got all that from you, and if the matter can be resolved by such details they are extremely competent at that sort of thing, and they are ahead of me, with an army. But I want to know about your conversation with Mr. Hazen after his wife and Mr. Weed left. What was said?"

"Nothing," Khoury declared.

"Nonsense. Mr. Hazen had told his wife he was going to discuss something with you. What?"

"Nothing of any importance. He opened champagne. We discussed the stock market. He asked Mrs. Talbot what plays she had seen. He got Perdis talking about ships."

"He talked about poisons," Perdis said.

"He talked about his wife's father," Mrs. Oliver said. "He said his wife's father was a great inventor, a genius."

Wolfe scowled at them. "This is egregious. If he discussed some aspect of his peculiar relations with you, naturally you didn't tell the police about it. But I know of those relations and the police don't. I intend to know what was said."

"You don't understand, Mr. Wolfe." It was Anne Talbot. She was leaning forward, appealing to him. "You didn't know him. He was a monster. He was a demon. He didn't want to discuss anything, he just wanted to have us there together, and we had to go. It was his special kind of torture. He wanted each of us to know about the others and to know that the others knew about us. He liked to see us trying to act as if it were just a—just a dinner party. You didn't know him."

"He was a devil," Perdis said.

Wolfe surveyed them. "Did he reveal to any of you the nature of his hold on the others, last evening or any other time? Or hint at it?"

Anne Talbot and Khoury shook their heads. Mrs. Oliver said, "No, oh, no." Perdis said, "I think he hinted. For instance, poison. I thought he hinted."

"But no particulars?"

"No."

"I must concede that he was not an estimable man. Very well, he is dead, and here we are. As I said, I have a proposal. It is highly likely, all but certain, that he kept in that box whatever

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support he had for his demands on you. The box is in my safe. I don't desire or intend to inspect its contents. But Mrs. Hazen is my client and I am committed to protect both her person and her property. She is not bound to follow her husband's instructions to burn the contents of the box, and it would be quixotic to destroy anything so valuable. I will surrender it to you, you four, for one million dollars."

They gawked at him.

"That's a large sum, but it is not exorbitant. In another seven years, if Mr. Hazen had lived, you would have paid him more than that, and that wouldn't have ended it. This will; this will be final. If I left it to you to apportion the burden you would probably haggle, and time is short, so I shall expect one quarter of the million from each of you, either in currency or certified checks, within twenty-four hours. There is no question of extortion by Mrs. Hazen or me; we haven't seen the contents of the box; I only say, as her agent, you may have them at that price if you want them."

"You haven't opened the box," Perdis said.

"No, I haven't."

"What if it's empty?"

"You get nothing and you pay nothing." Wolfe looked up at the clock. "The box will be opened here tomorrow at midnight, with all of you present, or earlier if and when you meet the terms. If it is empty, so much for that. If it isn't, there will of course be a difficulty. None of you will want the others to inspect the items that pertain to him. I don't want to look at any of them. I suggest that Mr. Goodwin, who is thoroughly discreet, may remove the items singly, examine each one only enough to determine whom it applies to, and hand it over. If you have a better procedure to suggest, do so."

Mrs. Oliver was licking her lips and swallowing, by turns. Perdis was hunched over, his lips tight, his heavy broad shoulders rising and falling with his breathing. Khoury had his chin up, his narrowed eyes aimed at Wolfe past the tip of his long thin nose. Anne Talbot's eyes were closed, and a muscle at the side of her pretty neck was twitching.

"I realize," Wolfe said, "that it may not be easy to produce so large a sum in so short a time, but it is not impossible, and I dare not give you longer. While it is true that the box and its contents are the property of Mrs. Hazen, the police would no doubt regard

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it as evidential in their investigation of a murder, and I can't undertake to withhold my knowledge of it longer than twenty-four hours." He pushed his chair back and rose. "I shall await your pleasure."

But if he was through they weren't. Mrs. Oliver wanted the box opened then and there, and a display of its contents by me. Khoury said that there *was* a question of extortion, that they were being told to fork over a million dollars in twenty-four hours or else. Perdis demanded that they be given the time and opportunity to talk with Mrs. Hazen, but of course she was in the coop. Anne Talbot was the only one who had nothing to say; she was on her feet, gripping the back of the chair, the muscle in her neck still twitching. Thinking it might help if I brought their coats, I did so, and it took Anne Talbot three tries to find the armhole.

When they were out, and the door shut, and I returned to the office, Wolfe was out from behind his desk. "A notion," I said. "Mrs. Hazen may be out on bail by the middle of the morning and accessible to them, and you're up in the plant rooms until eleven o'clock, not to be disturbed. Even if she's locked up, those people have lawyers and connections, Perdis especially. He may play poker with the D.A. I could phone Parker to see her in the morning and tell her that no matter what she hears you're not loony, you're just a genius, and you know where you're headed for even when nobody else does, including me."

"Not necessary." He went to the door and turned. "Make sure that the safe's locked, I'm tired. Good night."

He knows darned well that I always make sure the safe's locked, but of course it doesn't often have something in it that's supposed to be worth a million bucks. Up in my room on the third floor, as I undressed, I made assorted tries at deciding what was next on his program, and didn't like any of them.

As it turned out the next thing on the program wasn't decided either by me or by him, but by Inspector Cramer. In the morning Wolfe came down from the plant rooms at eleven o'clock as usual, and also as usual I had the mail opened and the dusting done and fresh water in the vase on his desk. He went first to the front of the desk to put a spray of orchids in the vase, Odontoglossum pyramus, then circled around to his chair. As he sat the doorbell rang.

I went to the office door for a look and told him it was Cramer. He slapped a palm on the desk, glared at me, and said nothing,

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and I went to the front and opened up. I didn't like the look on Cramer's face as he entered and let me take his coat and hat. He almost grinned at me, and he didn't stride to the office, he just walked. He sat in the red leather chair, crossed his legs comfortably, and told Wolfe, "I haven't got much time. I want to hear it from you what Mrs. Hazen came to you for yesterday, just the substance, and then Goodwin will come downtown and get it down in a statement, all of it. With his wonderful memory."

Wolfe was glowering at him. "Mr. Cramer. It shouldn't be—"

"Save it. She's booked for murder. We have the gun. Hazen got his car from the garage Monday night. It has been found parked on Twenty-first Street. There was a gun in the dashboard compartment, and it fired the bullet that killed him. We have traced it. It was bought by Hazen six years ago and he had a permit for it. He kept it in a drawer in his bedroom, and the maid saw it there yesterday morning when she went up to see why he hadn't come down for breakfast. Don't ask me why Mrs. Hazen took it from there afterwards and went to where she had parked the car on Twenty-first Street and put it in the car. I don't know, but maybe you do. So let's hear you."

I squeezed my eyes shut because if I had kept them open they would have popped, and I didn't want to give Cramer that satisfaction. But I am supposed to help Wolfe when he needs it, and right then he sure could use a few seconds to arrange his mind, so I opened my eyes and asked Cramer, just curious, "What kind of gun?"

He ignored it. He was having too good a time looking at Wolfe to bother with me. Wolfe was paying me another compliment. I was responsible for our assumption that Mrs. Hazen was innocent, but he didn't glance at me. He lowered his chin, scratched the tip of his nose, regarded Cramer for ten seconds, then turned to me.

"Archie. It may be desirable to have a record of what Mr. Cramer just said. Type it. Verbatim. Double-spaced, one carbon."

As I got at the typewriter Cramer said, "I don't object. Naturally you've got to stall while you try to figure a way to climb down without breaking your neck."

No comment from Wolfe. I put in paper and hit the keys. Since I had had years of practice reporting long and involved conversations that had had time to fade, that one was no trick at all. As I rolled the paper out Wolfe said, "Initial the original," and I did so,

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and handed it to him. He read it through; in no hurry, took his pen and initialed it, handed it back to me, and turned to Cramer.

"I'm not stalling," he said. "If what you just told me is true, your demand for information is warranted. If it isn't true you're gulling me into disclosing a confidential communication from a client, and I want a record—"

"Then she's your client?"

"She is now. She wasn't when you were here yesterday, but she hired me later through Mr. Parker. I want a record of your words, and I have it. I also want more facts, to make sure that those you have given me are not qualified by others. That's a reasonable precaution, I think. What time did Mr. Hazen take his car from the garage Monday evening?"

"A little after eleven o'clock."

"That was after the dinner guests left?"

"Yes. They left at a quarter to eleven."

"Was anyone with him at the garage?"

"No."

"Was anyone seen with him anywhere, out of the car or in it, after a quarter to eleven?"

"No."

"Is it assumed that he was shot in that alley where the body was found?"

"No. He was shot in the car."

"Have you any additional facts implicating Mrs. Hazen, of any kind? Not conjectures, facts. For example, was she seen in or near the car, driving it, or when it was parked on Twenty-first Street during the night, or when—as you have it—she went there yesterday to put the gun in the dashboard compartment?"

"No. No more facts. I expect to get some from you."

"You will. Naturally, when you learned that Mrs. Hazen had been to see me you focused on her, but surely not exclusively. Have you inquired into the movements of the dinner guests after they left?"

"Yes."

"Have any of them been conclusively eliminated?"

"No. Not conclusively."

Wolfe closed his eyes. In a moment he opened them. "That seems to cover it." He took a breath. "Of course I don't like this. And you're not squeezing it out of me, though you think you are. I would tell you nothing and take the consequences if it weren't

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that I need some information that I can get only from you. I have to know where the gun came from that Mrs. Hazen left with me yesterday. If you'll agree—"

"She left a gun with *you?*"

"Yes. I'll tell you about it, and give it to you, if you will give me its history at the earliest possible moment. I want your word."

"You won't get it. Mrs. Hazen is charged with murder. If she left a gun with you it's evidence in a murder investigation."

Wolfe shook his head. "No. It's evidence in my investigation, but not in yours. You have your gun, the one the murderer used. How can it embarrass you to tell me about this one?"

Cramer considered it. "You're going to tell me what she said about it."

"I am."

"Okay. Go ahead."

"I have your word?"

"Yes."

"Get the gun, Archie."

I went to the safe and squatted to twirl the knob. Ordinarily I leave it unlocked when I'm in the office, but with that box in it I was taking no chances, so after I had worked the combination and got the gun I shut the door and turned the knob. As I crossed to Cramer I spoke. "By the way, I asked a question that wasn't answered. What make is your gun? The one that killed him."

"Drexel thirty-two."

"So's this." I handed it to him. "Of course there are millions of Drexel thirty-twos."

He gave it a look, and darned if he didn't sniff it. As I said, that's automatic. Also he flipped the cylinder open for a glance.

"It was fired yesterday," Wolfe said, "by Mr. Goodwin, to get a bullet. The bullet I gave you."

Cramer nodded. "Yeah. There's nothing on God's earth you wouldn't do. It could have been. . .What the hell, it wasn't. Okay, let's hear you."

Wolfe unloaded. He didn't enjoy it and neither did I, spilling it, but we had to know about the gun and it might have taken us days. He skipped the details, including no quotes, but gave it straight, both parts, before the news came over the radio and after. He didn't include my reasons for deciding that she hadn't shot her husband, but I didn't mind; it might have got Cramer confused and that would have been a pity. He was a little confused

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anyhow; toward the end he was frowning, pulling at his lip now and then, a wary look in his eyes. When Wolfe finished he sat looking at it before he spoke.

"What have you left out?" he demanded.

Wolfe shook his head. "Nothing material. You said you wanted the substance; you have it. How long will it take to trace the gun?"

"I don't get it. After she came to you with that fairy tale, and the news came about her husband, and you learned that we were holding her, you took her for a client? I don't get it. I have never known you to take a murderer for a client. Whether it's just your damn luck, or what, I don't know, but you haven't. Why did you take her?"

A corner of Wolfe's mouth turned up. "I asked Mr. Goodwin's opinion and he said she was innocent. His judgment of women under thirty is infallible. How long will it take to trace the gun?"

"Nuts." Cramer stood up. "Maybe an hour, maybe a week. I'm taking Goodwin. They'll take his statement at the District Attorney's office, a complete report of the conversation. I'll have a man here at two o'clock to take yours. If I took you down you'd only—"

"I shall sign no statement. I am not obliged to. If you send a man he won't be admitted. If you have questions, ask them."

Cramer's round red face got redder. But that was as far as it went; his memory of what had happened on the three occasions he had taken Wolfe downtown was presumably what stopped him. He stuck the gun in his pocket and turned to me. "Come on, Goodwin. We'll see."

As I arose the phone rang and I reached to get it. It was Nathaniel Parker. He was upset. "Archie? Nat Parker. Mrs. Hazen is being held on a charge of homicide, without bail. I want to see Wolfe before I see her. I have to know what she told him yesterday. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Fine," I said. "He's in a perfect mood for it. Come ahead." I hung up, told Wolfe, "Parker will be here in twenty minutes," and went to the hall for my coat and hat with Cramer at my heels.

During the next nine hours I had various opportunities to try to sort it out. En route in a police car to the D.A.'s office, later from there to Homicide West on 20th Street, and several waiting periods while assorted officers of the law, including the D.A. himself at one point, decided what to do next.

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It was complicated enough even before an Assistant D.A. kindly permitted me to use a phone, around three o'clock, and I called Wolfe. Of course the game was button, button, who had the gun when and where? Either gun. If Lucy Hazen had lied, how much? Had the gun that the maid had seen in the drawer Tuesday morning been the one that had shot Hazen or the one she had brought to Wolfe?

If the latter, Lucy was a liar and also either was a murderer or could name him. If the former, who had put it in the drawer and when? And why? It wasn't that there were no possible answers; there were too many. And too many of them made it too likely that Lucy had made a monkey of me and therefore were not acceptable.

The first hour or so I was entertained by an Assistant D.A. named Mandel, who was not a stranger to me, and a Homicide Bureau lieutenant, and it was obvious that the gun puzzle was as tough for them as it was for me, though they didn't say so. Then, while we were having sandwiches and coffee, no recess called, at Mandel's desk, a phone call came for him, and he took the lieutenant to another room, and when they returned their attitude was quite different.

Apparently they were no longer interested in guns; they concentrated on what Lucy had said to Wolfe and me, her exact words; and finally, a little before three o'clock, Mandel called a stenographer in and told me to start dictating my statement. Of course the room was wired for sound, and they would have fun later comparing my dictated statement with what I had told them. It was then that I insisted on making a phone call and was escorted to a booth.

I got Wolfe. "Me. In a booth at the D.A.'s office, and it may be tapped. They should be finished with me by the end of the week. They were curious about guns, and then a phone call came and they weren't. I thought you might like to know."

"I already know." He didn't sound depressed. "Mr. Cramer phoned shortly after one. The gun we gave him had been traced without difficulty. It was purchased by Mrs. Hazen's father, Titus Postel, in 1953, and he committed suicide with it five years ago, in 1955."

"And she had it?"

"Not established. I have told Mr. Parker to ask her when he sees her this afternoon. Meanwhile I have given Saul an errand."

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I would have liked to ask him what errand, but that wasn't advisable since we might have company on the line. Saul Panzer, the first and best man on our list when we need help, charges more than any other free-lance operative in New York, and is worth five times as much. I told Wolfe I might or might not be home for dinner.

Dictating my statement to the stenographer, I had to keep jerking my mind back to it. The gun puzzle was okay now for the cops, since they had tagged Lucy; now they didn't have to buy it that she had been nutty enough to take the gun home after she shot him and put it in the drawer, and the next day get it and take it back to the car. It was much neater. She had got the gun from the drawer Monday, put the one she had, that had been her father's, in its place, and left it in the car after she shot him. And Tuesday she had got the gun from the drawer and brought it to Wolfe as a prop for her fairy tale, evidently not knowing that guns have numbers that can be traced. What better could you ask for?

But for me, unless I was ready to give Lucy up as a bad job, it was what worse could I ask for. Before, there had been too many answers; now there weren't any. I had to file it while I dictated my statement, in which I was supposed to include everything Lucy had said to us in Wolfe's office, and while I went over it after it was typed, and it wasn't easy.

Then I was taken to the office of the D.A. himself, and he and Mandel pecked at me for an hour; and when they finished, around 6:30, and I supposed that was all for the day, I was informed that Cramer wanted me at Homicide West. If I had balked they would have booked me as a material witness and Parker couldn't come to the rescue until morning, so I took it.

In one respect it was an improvement. The dick at Homicide West whom Cramer sent for sandwiches happened to be civilized enough to think that even a dog has a right to eat what he likes, and I got what I asked for, corned beef on rye and milk. Except for that, it was just more of the same for more than two hours with Cramer and Sergeant Purley Stebbins. I didn't even have the satisfaction of getting a chance to break my record with Lieutenant Rowcliff. I once got him stuttering in two minutes and twenty seconds, and I have a bet with Saul Panzer that I can do it in two minutes flat with three more tries.

Cramer and Stebbins finally decided they had had enough of

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me. It was 9:32 by my watch, and 9:34 by the clock on the wall, which was wrong, as I crossed the reception room of the precinct house to the door, and on out. I stood on the sidewalk for three good breaths of the cold fresh air, giving my lungs a treat and deciding which way to turn. If right, toward Eighth Avenue, it would be for a taxi; if left, toward Ninth, it would be for a fifteen-minute walk. Voting for the walk, I moved, and had taken three steps when my shoulder was grabbed and yanked from behind and a voice came, with feeling: "You dirty rat!"

The yank had turned me some and I turned myself the rest of the way. It was Theodore Weed. His hands were fists, and the right one was back a foot, with the elbow bent. His eyes were blazing and his bony jaw was set.

"Not here, you damn fool," I said. "Even if you drop me with one swing, which is doubtful, I'll yell police as I go down and here they'll come. Besides, I have a right to know why I'm a rat while I'm still conscious. Why?"

"You know why. You're a filthy stool, and Nero Wolfe too. You're working for Lucy? You are like hell. You gave the police that gun."

"How do you know we did?"

"Things they asked me. Do you deny it?"

My brain was a little tired after the long day, but it was doing its best. This character was by no means crossed off. We only had his word for it that he would give both arms to help Lucy; he had said himself that she didn't know how he felt about her. A chat with him wouldn't hurt and might help, but I couldn't take him home with me until I knew what Wolfe had on his program, if anything.

He still had fists. "I'll tell you what," I said. "We'll go around the corner to Jake's and I'll buy you a drink and we'll discuss it. Then if you still want to take a poke at me Jake will let us use the back room provided we let him watch. Afterwards you can comb your hair if you're up to it. It needs it."

It didn't appeal to him, but what would have? A couple of passersby, noticing his stance and his fists, had stopped to see, and a harness bull, emerging from the station, had also stopped. So he came.

At Jake's, when we had sat at a table by the wall and given our orders to the white apron, and I said I had to make a phone call, he got up and came along to the booth. Very bad manners, but I

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didn't correct him. I even let him stand in the door of the booth so I couldn't close it. I dialed a number and got it.

"Me. In a booth on Eighth Avenue. Theodore Weed is here at my elbow. He stopped me on the sidewalk to tell me that you and I are filthy stools because we gave the gun to the cops. When I asked him how he knew we did he said from things they asked him, which is possible since he had just come from Homicide West, probably from a session with Rowcliff, and you know Rowcliff. I'm buying him a drink, but I thought you might like to apologize to him personally for tossing our client to the wolves. He has blood in his eye."

"No. Come home at once."

"You have Saul."

"Not here. I need you. Mrs. Oliver and Mr. Perdis are in the front room. Mrs. Oliver has been here since seven o'clock. Mr. Khoury will arrive at any moment. I have been pestered by this confounded telephone all day. Mrs. Talbot called for the fifth time half an hour ago to say that she hopes to be here by ten o'clock, and it's nearly that now. On second thought, bring Mr. Weed. I have a question for him."

"You'll have to bulldog him first."

"Pfui. Bring him. How soon will you be here?"

I told him fifteen minutes, and hung up. "No time for a drink," I told Weed. "Nor for a floor show, with me on the floor. Mr. Wolfe wants me. You may come along if you care to."

"I was going there," he said grimly, "when I saw you."

"Good. But take it easy. He has a knife in his belt that he uses to stab people in the back."

On the way out I handed the white apron, whose name was Gil, a couple of ones. Outside, we flagged a taxi, and as it rolled uptown I undertook to straighten him out. "Look at it," I said. "If we're stools and selling her to the cops there's not much of anything you can do but shoot us, and even that wouldn't help her any. The fact is, we're with her and you're not. We know she didn't kill her husband. Either you thought she had and probably still do, or you killed him yourself. If the former, your feeling for her has got a smudge. If the latter, you did a swell job, handling it so that she gets the credit for it. Go soak your head."

"Why did you give the police the gun?"

"Soak your head some more. We're working for her, not you."

No comment, then: "I don't think she killed him."

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"Good for you. We appreciate it."

"And I didn't."

"That's not so important, but we'll keep it in mind."

At the curb in front of the old brownstone there was a black limousine with a chauffeur in it. That would be Mrs. Oliver's. Mounting the seven steps to the stoop, I used my key, but the chain bolt was on and I had to ring for Fritz. As he took Weed's coat and I disposed of mine, he said, "Thank God, Archie, thank God," and I asked him what for, and he said, "For you. It has been very bad. Three phone calls during dinner, and that woman was in the front room."

"I can imagine. How many are in there now?"

"Three. Her and two men."

So Khoury had come. I took Weed to the office. Wolfe was at his desk with a book. Weed headed for him, talking. "I want to know why—"

"Shut up!" Wolfe bellowed.

Wolfe's bellow would stop a tiger ready to spring. Weed stood and glared at him. Wolfe finished a paragraph, inserted his marker, put the book down, and issued a command. "Sit down. I prefer eyes at my level. Sit down! When you arrived at the Hazens' for dinner Monday evening were the others already there?"

"I want to know why you gave the gun—"

"Bah. Are you a jackass? You must be, to suppose you can call me to account. Sit down! You said you would give an arm to help Mrs. Hazen. Keep your arm; I want only some information. Must I repeat my question?"

Five of the yellow chairs were there. Weed took the nearest one. He ran his fingers through his mop of hair, but only a comb and brush could have handled it. "Mrs. Oliver was there," he said. "And Khoury, Perdis, and Mrs. Talbot came soon after I did. I don't see why—"

"This is what I want to know. While you were there, was any one of them absent from the gathering long enough to go to Mr. Hazen's bedroom and back? Consider it. Dismiss your fatuous huff for the moment and put your mind on something pertinent."

Weed tried to. To do so he had to take his eyes from Wolfe, so he tilted his head back and looked at the ceiling. He took his time, then lowered his head. "I don't think so. I'm pretty sure none of them left the room at all, either before we went to the dining room or after. They were all there when I left, so—"

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The doorbell rang. I went to the hall, but Fritz was there opening the door. When the newcomer had crossed the sill I stepped back into the office and Wolfe asked, "Mrs. Talbot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Weed to the hall, then bring them in, and Mr. Weed to the front room. We may need him later."

"I'm staying right here," Weed declared, "until I—"

"You are not. I have work to do and no time to bicker with you. Out. Out!"

"But damn it—"

"Out."

Weed looked at me, standing at the door. What he met was a stony gaze. He got up and walked past me and into the hall. When he was four paces along I went and opened the door to the front room.

I put Anne Talbot in the chair nearest me because from her face and the way she moved it seemed likely that she might need smelling salts any minute, and there were some in my drawer. Next to her was Jules Khoury, then Mrs. Oliver, and then Ambrose Perdis. I had expected remarks as they entered, especially from Mrs. Oliver, who had been waiting more than three hours, but there hadn't been a peep from anyone. I felt like an usher at a funeral.

Wolfe took them in. "Since you are here," he said, "I assume that you are prepared to act on my proposal. Mrs. Oliver?"

I had her in profile and couldn't see her deep-set yellow eyes, and from that angle her sagging jowl was even less attractive. She opened her bag and took out a slip of paper. "This is a cashier's check," she said, "on the Knickerbocker Trust Company for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, made out to me. I'll endorse it. Or I won't."

"That will of course depend. Mrs. Talbot?"

Anne Talbot's lips parted but no sound came. She tried again and got it out. "I have a certified check for sixty-five thousand dollars and forty thousand dollars in cash. I'll pay the rest as soon as I can—I think I can pay it in a month, but it might take longer. Of course you'll want me to sign something, a note, whatever you say. I tried—" She had to swallow. "I tried—" Another swallow. "I did the best I could."

"Mr. Perdis?"

"I have a certified check for my share."

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"The full amount?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Khoury?"

"I have nothing."

"Indeed. Then why are you here?"

"I want to know what's in the box. If there's anything worth a quarter of a million to me, I'll buy it."

"The deadline is midnight." Wolfe glanced at the clock. "You have ninety minutes."

"I don't think so. I don't think Mrs. Hazen knows about this. I think you're putting the screws to us without her knowledge. Whatever you're doing, I want to know what's in the box."

"Well." Wolfe's eyes left him to take in the others. "This situation was not covered by the terms of my proposal. Two of you are prepared to comply with the terms and should not suffer for Mr. Khoury's dissent. As for you, Mrs. Talbot, I am willing to accept your declaration of good faith, that you have done your best. You will of course commit yourself in writing to pay the balance. As for you, Mr. Khoury—if you are willful, so am I. Whatever the box contains that relates to you will be turned over to the police at midnight. Archie, get the box and the key." Back to them: "We have procured a key that will serve."

Thinking it desirable to keep up appearances, I first got a Marley from the drawer and loaded it. Then to the cabinet for the key, and then to the safe. As I worked the combination my back was to them, but as I opened the door and took out the box I had an eye on them, not only for appearances. It was conceivable that Perdis or Khoury, or both, had come with the idea of getting something for nothing if a chance offered.

All four of them had twisted around in their chairs to follow me, and they twisted back as I circled around to Wolfe's desk. As I was putting the box down, the phone rang. It would. I was going to tell Wolfe to take it, but didn't have to.

He lifted the receiver. "Yes?. . .Yes, Saul. . .indeed. That isn't necessary. . .Satisfactory. . .No, stay there, Archie is here. . .How sure are you?. . .Very satisfactory. . .No, call again in an hour or so."

As he hung up there was a gleam in his eye. "Open it," he said. I inserted the key, fiddled with it a little, got it, lifted the lid all the way, stared a second for effect, and said, "It's empty," and when Perdis bounced up, my hand jerked up with the gun, not

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having been told that part of the performance was over. I slipped the gun in my pocket and turned the box on its edge so that all could see the shiny inside.

Perdis blurted at Wolfe, "Damn you! You've got it! You had a key!"

Mrs. Oliver squawked something. Anne Talbot lowered her head and covered her face with her hands.

Khoury stood up, vetoed whatever he had intended, and sat down again. He spoke. "Use your head, Perdis. He didn't even know it was empty. Why would he—"

"You're wrong," Wolfe snapped. "I did know it was empty. I knew it last night when I made my proposal."

They were speechless. Anne Talbot lifted her head. "I made the proposal," Wolfe said, "not out of caprice, to plague you, but for a purpose, and the purpose has been served. You have the gun, Archie? Go and stand at the door. No one is to leave."

I obeyed. Perdis, still on his feet, was in the way, so I detoured around back of the chairs. He was yapping, and Khoury was up again. Of course I hadn't the dimmest idea what was coming next as I shut the door and put my back to it, gun in hand, but apparently Wolfe had.

Ignoring them, Wolfe had lifted the receiver and was dialing. Since he hadn't consulted the book and there were only three phone numbers he bothered to keep in his head, I knew who he must be getting, even before he spoke and asked for Mr. Cramer. In a moment he had him.

"Mr. Cramer? The situation has developed as I expected. How soon can you be here with Mrs. Hazen? . . .No. I will not. I told you more than half an hour ago that I would almost certainly call you. . .No. I told you that her presence would be essential. If you come without her you won't be admitted. . .Yes. I am prepared to suggest a substitute. . .Yes. . .Yes!"

Mrs. Oliver was on her feet too; they all were, except for Anne Talbot, and as Wolfe hung up Perdis said through his teeth, "Damn you, you gave it to the police!"

"No," Wolfe said. "Are you a dunce? Would I contrive such a hocus-pocus just to pass the time? Confound it, sit down! I have something to say that you would prefer to hear before Mr. Cramer arrives."

"I'm leaving," Mrs. Oliver said. "This was all a trick and you'll regret it. I'm going."

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"No one is going. Mr. Goodwin wouldn't shoot you, but he wouldn't have to. Sit down."

Khoury, with his chair right back of his knees, merely had to bend them. Perdis, going to his chair, jostled Mrs. Oliver and didn't apologize. She turned to face me at the door, decided Wolfe was right that I wouldn't have to shoot, and sat.

"You heard me on the phone," Wolfe told them. "Mr. Cramer will be here shortly, and Mrs. Hazen will be with him. The nature of your peculiar relations with Mr. Hazen will have to be divulged to him, that can't be helped, but he doesn't have to know of your invasion of that house yesterday evening. It's only fair—don't interrupt me, there isn't much time—"

Perdis insisted. "You have no evidence of our relations with Hazen."

"Pfui. Your bid to Mr. Goodwin? It's only fair that three of you should know about the box. All that I told you about it last evening was true—Mr. Hazen showing it to his wife and telling her that if he died she should get it and burn the contents, and Mr. Goodwin getting it from beneath the drawer after sending you from the room. Asked by Mr. Perdis if I had opened it, I said no. But Mr. Goodwin had, and it was empty."

"I don't believe it," Mrs. Oliver said. "It's a trick."

Wolfe nodded. "I concocted a trick, that's true, but it's a fact that the box was empty. That's what you have a right to know, three of you. It's an understatement to say that you would like to know where the former contents are, but I have no idea and neither has Mr. Goodwin, and I'm sure Mrs. Hazen hasn't. The obvious conjecture is that Mr. Hazen transferred them to some other place which he preferred. If I could offer—"

"She has them," Mrs. Oliver said harshly, "Lucy Hazen. I suppose you don't know it or you wouldn't have had us come ready to pay. She took them after she killed him and now we'll have her. She'll be in prison but we'll have her the rest of our lives."

"I don't believe it," Anne Talbot said. She hadn't spoken since the box had been opened. "Lucy wouldn't do that. But this is even worse than it was. . .Now we don't know. . .and I tried so hard. . ."

"I don't believe the box was empty," Khoury told Wolfe. "I think you're lying."

"I don't," Perdis said. "Why would he? There's six hundred and five thousand dollars here ready for him." His eyes went to Wolfe. "But this Cramer—that's Inspector Cramer? You said he has to

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know about what you call our peculiar relations with Hazen. Why does he?"

The doorbell rang. I was on post and could have let Fritz take it, but they were all in their chairs, so I opened the door to the hall and stepped through. I expected to see Cramer alone, since there hadn't been time for him to get Lucy from the jug, but she was there with him on the stoop, and at her elbow was Sergeant Purley Stebbins. He must have had her brought to 20th Street when Wolfe made his first phone call.

And as I dropped the gun in my pocket and moved, the door to the front room opened and Theodore Weed darted out and to the front door. He couldn't possibly have heard through the soundproofed wall and door, so either he had been looking out of a window or his feeling for her included some kind of a personal electronic receiver.

Seeing no reason to spoil his fun, I let him open the door. Cramer shot him a glance as he entered. Lucy crossed the threshold, saw him, and stopped. She stared, and he stared back. He lifted a hand and let it drop. Stebbins, back of her, growled, "On in, Mrs. Hazen."

She looked at me, and back at Weed, and I said, "Everything's under control, Mrs. Hazen," and Weed backed up a step. I thought, and still think, that he had intended to warn her that Wolfe and I were a pair of Judases, but the mere sight of her paralyzed him.

Weed stood and stared while Cramer and Stebbins got their coats off and I took hers and put it on a hanger. When we headed for the office he followed us, and there was no point in herding him back to the front room. Either Wolfe had the cards or he hadn't.

Three steps in, Cramer stopped to send his eyes around. I didn't envy him any. The four people there weren't a bunch of bums, anything but; they had position and connections and lawyers if necessary, and much wampum. And here he was, in the office of a private detective, with a woman charged with murder.

Of course he had a good reason: he suspected he might have stubbed his toe. I hadn't been present when Wolfe had made his previous phone call, but presumably he had said that he expected soon to be ready to offer a substitute for Mrs. Hazen, and Cramer knew Wolfe only too well.

But naturally he didn't care to give that reason to that audi-

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ence. He faced them. "I'm here because Wolfe told me that you four people would be here and I wanted to know what he had to say to you. I brought Mrs. Hazen because from something Wolfe said I got the idea that it would be in the interest of justice for her to be here. I want to make it plain that as an officer of the law I don't rely on any private detective to do my job for me, and what's more no private detective is going to interfere."

He went to the red leather chair and sat. Stebbins took Lucy to the extra chair, next to Perdis, and stood behind her. That way they had their murderer surrounded, with Cramer in front of her only three paces off. Weed went to a chair over by the big globe. As I circled around to get to my desk Wolfe spoke.

"Mr. Stebbins. Mrs. Hazen is your prisoner, and of course it's your duty to guard her. But I doubt if she intends any outbreak. If you wish to stand by the murderer of Mr. Hazen I suggest that you move to Mr. Khoury."

Silence. Not a sound. For the record, for how people react, four of them—Cramer, Lucy, Mrs. Oliver, and Anne Talbot—kept their eyes at Wolfe. Perdis and Sergeant Stebbins moved theirs to Khoury. Weed, over by the globe, got up, took a step, and stopped.

Khoury's head tilted back, slowly, until his eyes were focused on Wolfe past the tip of his long thin nose. "That's my name," he said. "I'm the only Khoury here."

"You are indeed." Wolfe's head turned. "Mr. Cramer. As I said, I am prepared to offer a substitute for your consideration, but that's all. Not only have I no conclusive evidence, I have none at all. I have only some suggestive facts. First, Mr. Hazen was a blackmailer. He extorted large sums, not only from these four people, but also from others, using his public-relations business as a cover. He had in his possession—"

"You can't prove that," Mrs. Oliver blurted.

"But I can," he told her. "Item, you have in your bag a check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. For what? Account for it. I advise you, madam, to hold your tongue. I would prefer to tell Mr. Cramer only what I must to support my suggestion, and I'll go beyond that only if you force me to. You shouldn't have challenged me. Now that you have, I put it to you, were the amounts that you paid Mr. Hazen ostensibly for professional services, actually paid under coercion?"

She looked down at the bag in her lap, looked up again, and said, "Yes."

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"Then don't interrupt me." Wolfe returned to Cramer. "Mr. Hazen had in his possession various objects, I don't know what, to substantiate his demands. Last evening I told these four people that I had secured those objects and that I would surrender them for one million dollars, giving them twenty-four hours to meet my terms. They are here. Three of them—"

"The objects are here?" Cramer demanded.

"No. I don't know where they are. I have never seen them. The people are here. This will go better if you keep your questions until I'm through. Three of them—Mrs. Oliver, Mrs. Talbot, and Mr. Perdis—came prepared to pay, and that was what I was after. I was acting on the premise, certainly worth a test, that one of Hazen's victims had killed him, and to kill him would have been futile unless he got the object or objects that had made it possible for Hazen to bleed him.

"For a moment I abandon fact for surmise. Mr. Khoury did get the object or objects. By some ruse, probably with the promise of a large sum of money as a lure, he induced Hazen to get his car from the garage Monday night and drive somewhere, and to have with him the object or objects. That surmise is not haphazard. The others came here this evening prepared to pay, but not Mr. Khoury. He knew I had nothing to support my threat. Even when I told him that the objects pertaining to him would be given to the police in ninety minutes he was unmoved."

"Get back to facts," Cramer growled. His head turned. "Mr. Khoury, do you want to comment?"

"No." From Khoury's smile you might have thought he was enjoying it. "This is fascinating. I thought I had decided not to bring my share of the million because I didn't believe he had anything that threatened anybody."

Wolfe, ignoring him, stayed at Cramer. "For a fact I submit the conversation at the gathering Monday evening after Mrs. Hazen and Mr. Weed had left. Of course you and your staff have it in detail, but you didn't know that Hazen was a blackmailer and that he not only bled his prey, he was pleased to torment them. In that conversation he introduced topics that obviously referred to the pinch he had them in—for instance, poison.

"I don't know which of those present that touched, and am not concerned. But one of his topics pointed clearly at Mr. Khoury. He remarked that his wife's father had been a great inventor, a genius; and his wife's father, Titus Postel, had been associated

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with Mr. Khoury. So it seemed likely that his hold on Mr. Khoury was in some way connected with Titus Postel, but at the time I learned that, yesterday evening, I had no reason to single out Mr. Khoury for special attention, so I merely noted it for possible future application."

Wolfe took a breath. "But two incidents today did single out Mr. Khoury. Shortly after one o'clock you phoned me to say that the gun I had given you had been the property of Titus Postel and that he had committed suicide with it five years ago; and soon after that, on the telephone with Mr. Khoury, he informed me that he would be present this evening but that he was declining my proposal. He didn't put it in those terms, but that was the gist."

Khoury made a noise, a subdued snort. Cramer said, "Yes, Mr. Khoury?"

"Nothing," Khoury said.

Wolfe resumed. "Now the guns. Call them Gun H, Mr. Hazen's, the one he was shot with, left in his car; and Gun P, Mr. Postel's, which I gave you this morning. My account of them is not established fact, but it is more than mere surmise because it is based on a high degree of probability. When Mr. Khoury went to that grotesque dinner party Monday evening he had Gun P with him. During the—"

"You can prove he had it?"

"Certainly not, I'm telling you what happened, not what I can prove. During the evening he found or made an opportunity to go to Mr. Hazen's bedroom, took Gun H from the drawer, and put Gun P in its place. With a double purpose: first, and minor, so that Hazen would find a gun there—they were the same make—if he looked for it. Second, and major, to implicate Mrs. Hazen. He intended to leave Gun H in the car after he killed Hazen.

"The police would of course learn that it had been Hazen's, kept in that drawer in his room, and when they found Gun P there in its place, the gun that had belonged to Mrs. Hazen's father, they would naturally assume that she had put it there in a witless effort to mislead them. By the way." His head turned. "Mrs. Hazen. The gun that had belonged to your father—was it in your possession?"

Lucy's lips formed a "No," but there was almost no sound where I sat, five steps away.

"When did you see it last?"

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She shook her head. "I don't understand." I could hear her now. "When they told me the gun I brought you was the one my father shot himself with I thought they were lying. I don't understand."

"No wonder. Neither do the police. Did you ever have that gun—your father's?"

"I had it for a while. They gave it to me after. . .after he died. I kept it with some of his things. But it disappeared."

"How long after his death did it disappear?"

"I don't know. It was about two years after that I noticed it was gone."

"Had you any idea who took it?"

"I didn't know, but I thought perhaps Mrs. Khoury had. I didn't ask her. She thought I shouldn't keep it because it only reminded me. . ." She let it hang. "Is it true that my husband was a blackmailer?"

"Yes. And your former employer is not only a murderer, he tried to make you his scapegoat. You have been unfortunate in your choice of male associates, but I can relieve your mind about one you didn't choose, your father. He didn't commit suicide; he was murdered. By Mr. Khoury."

"No," Khoury said. "Another one? You're piling it on."

Wolfe leveled his eyes at him. "Your aplomb is admirable, sir," he said, no sarcasm. "Of course you're counting on what I said at the beginning, that I have no evidence. You're too sanguine. The evidence almost certainly exists, but to get it will require authority and a large trained staff, and I have neither. I am obliged to Mr. Hazen for a valuable hint, his remark that Mrs. Hazen's father was a great inventor and a genius. That suggests that you might have cheated him out of the proceeds of his genius, and immediately after talking with you on the phone today I put a man on it."

Wolfe turned to Cramer. "The man was Saul Panzer. You know his capacities. He phoned me about an hour ago, just before I called you, and what he reported was the basis for my statement to Mrs. Hazen, that Khoury killed her father. I don't tell you what he reported because you will get it from him, and also because I don't want Mr. Khoury to know what has been uncovered, and neither do you.

"As I said, I am only offering a suggestion, but I trust it is cogent enough to persuade you to restrict Mr. Khoury's movements, and to put some men to work. He may have taken Hazen's keys

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on the chance that they might be useful, and he may still have them, though not on his person. Find them. Ransack his premises. He may even still have the object or objects he certainly took; find them. If you see his wife before he is allowed to communicate with her you may learn something about Gun P."

He flipped a hand. "But this is superfluous; you know your job. If I—"

Khoury had moved. No rush, he wasn't a bit disturbed, but he was on his feet. "Really," he said, "there's a limit." His straight line to the door was in front of Mrs. Oliver and Perdis and Lucy, but it would have been bad manners to cross their bows, so he started around. On past Mrs. Oliver, and Perdis, and Lucy, with Stebbins at her shoulder, before Cramer spoke. "Stop him, Purley."

Khoury whirled, saying through his teeth, "Don't touch me."

"Nuts," Purley said, and began going over him for a gun. Gun X, maybe. Anyway, Khoury couldn't have made it to the hall because Theodore Weed was there filling the door.

I'll have to leave it with two loose ends.

First, the object or objects pertaining to Anne Talbot, Mrs. Oliver, Perdis, and presumably other assorted Hazen clients. They have never turned up. At least, the cops never found them. If one of the clients did, he didn't announce it. So if the hints Hazen scattered around at the dinner party aroused your curiosity, I can't satisfy it.

Second, the fee that Wolfe had certainly earned. Lucy refused to take any of Hazen's leavings; she wouldn't even take the house. That was noble, and even decent, considering how he had got it, but private detectives have to eat. Unquestionably Nero Wolfe has to eat. There's a chance that she'll get a chunk of Khoury's pile eventually, on account of the evidence Cramer dug up that Khoury had stolen a couple of Titus Postel's inventions; but Khoury, who is now in the death house while his lawyers hop around from court to court, has admitted nothing, and neither has his wife. So if you're curious as to how much Wolfe collected for his thirty-six hours' work I can't satisfy you on that either.

As for a third point you might be curious about, whether Lucy and Theodore Weed have found out how they feel about each other, you may have one guess. If you need more than one, what do you suppose makes the world go around?

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Dick Francis

Carrot for a Chestnut

Dick Francis, with only a dozen or so detective novels, has won an extremely high position among contemporary mystery writers. His books about racing have been universally praised—he has created a "special world"—"taut and sophisticated thrillers"—that are "explosive down the stretch"; he "has a remarkable knack of gripping even those with no interest in the world" of men, horses, and racing.

Dick Francis' secret? Simple. He knows what he's writing about—he's a former professional jockey, indeed became Britain's champion steeplechase jockey and for four years was the jockey for the Queen Mother.

Here is Dick Francis at his most knowledgeable best, in a steeplechase story—"sheer tension" all the way . . .

Chick stood and sweated with the carrot in his hand. His head seemed to be floating and he couldn't feel his feet on the ground, and the pulse thudded massively in his ear. A clammy green pain shivered in his gut.

Treachery was making him sick.

The time: 50 minutes before sunrise. The morning: cold. The raw swirling wind was clearing its throat for a fiercer blow, and a heavy layer of nimbostratus was fighting every inch of the way against the hint of light. In the neat box stalls round the stable yard the dozing horses struck a random hoof against a wooden wall, rattled a tethering chain, sneezed the hay dust out of a moist black nostril.

Chick was late. Two hours late. He'd been told to give the carrot to the lanky chestnut at four o'clock in the morning, but at four o'clock in the morning it had been pouring with rain—hard, slanting rain that soaked a man to the skin in one minute flat, and Chick had reckoned it would be too difficult explaining away a soaking at four o'clock in the morning. Chick had reckoned it

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would be better to wait until the rain stopped, it couldn't make any difference. Four o'clock, six o'clock, what the hell. Chick always knew better than anyone else.

Chick was a thin, disgruntled 19-year-old who always felt the world owed him more than he got. He had been a bad-tempered, argumentative child and an aggressively rebellious adolescent. The resulting snarling habit of mind was precisely what was now hindering his success as an adult. Not that Chick would have agreed, of course. Chick never agreed with anyone if he could help it. Always knew better, did Chick.

He was unprepared for the severity of the physical symptoms of fear. His usual attitude toward any form of authority was scorn (and authority had not so far actually belted him one across his sulky mouth). Horses had never scared him because he had been born to the saddle and had grown up mastering everything on four legs with contemptuous ease. He believed in his heart that no one could really ride better than he could. He was wrong.

He looked apprehensively over his shoulder, and the shifting pain in his stomach sharply intensified. That simply couldn't happen, he thought wildly. He'd heard about people getting sick with fear. He hadn't believed it. It couldn't happen. Now, all of a sudden, he feared it could. He tightened all his muscles desperately, and the spasm slowly passed. It left fresh sweat standing out all over his skin and no saliva in his mouth.

The house was dark. Upstairs, behind the black open window with the pale curtain flapping in the spartan air, slept Arthur Morrison, trainer of the 43 race horses in the stables below. Morrison habitually slept lightly. His ears were sharper than half a dozen guard dogs', his stable hands said.

Chick forced himself to turn his head away, to walk in view of that window, to take ten exposed steps down to the chestnut's stall.

If the guvnor woke up and saw him. . .Gawd, he thought furiously, he hadn't expected it to be like this. Just a lousy walk down the yard to give a carrot to the gangly chestnut. Guilt and fear and treachery. They bypassed his sneering mind and erupted through his nerves.

He couldn't see anything wrong with the carrot. It hadn't been cut in half and hollowed out and packed with drugs and tied together again. He'd tried pulling the thick end out like a plug, and that hadn't worked either. The carrot just looked like any old car-

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rot, any old carrot you'd watch your ma chop up to put in a stew. Any old carrot you'd give to any old horse. Not a very young, succulent carrot or a very aged carrot, knotted and woody. Just any old ordinary *carrot*.

But strangers didn't proposition you to give any old carrot to one special horse in the middle of the night. They didn't give you more than you earned in half a year when you said you'd do it. Any old carrot didn't come wrapped carefully alone in a polythene bag inside an empty cheese-cracker packet, given to you by a stranger in a car park after dark in a town six miles from the stables. You didn't give any old carrot in the middle of the night to a chestnut who was due to start favorite in a high-class steeplechase eleven hours later.

Chick was getting dizzy with holding his breath by the time he'd completed the ten tiptoed steps to the chestnut's stall. Trying not to cough, not to groan, not to let out the strangling tension in a sob, he curled his sweating fingers around the bolt and began the job of easing it, inch by frightening inch, from its socket.

By day he slammed the bolts open and shut with a smart practised flick. His body shook in the darkness with the strain of moving by fractions.

The bolt came free with the tiniest of grating noises, and the top half of the split door swung slowly outward. No squeaks from the hinges, only the whisper of metal on metal. Chick drew in a long breath like a painful, trickling, smothered gasp and let it out between his clenched teeth. His stomach lurched again, threateningly. He took another quick, appalled grip on himself and thrust his arm in a panic through the dark, open space.

Inside the stall the chestnut was asleep, dozing on his feet. The changing swirl of air from the opening door moved the sensitive hairs around his muzzle and raised his mental state from semiconsciousness to inquisitiveness. He could smell the carrot. He could also smell the man: smell the fear in the man's sweat.

"Come on," Chick whispered desperately. "Come on, then, boy."

The horse moved his nose around toward the carrot and finally, reluctantly, his feet. He took it indifferently from the man's trembling palm, whiffing it in with his black mobile lips, scrunching it languidly with large rotations of jaw. When he had swallowed all the pulped-up bits he poked his muzzle forward for more. But there was no more, just the lighter square of sky darkening again as the door swung shut, just the faint sounds of the

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bolt going back, just the fading smell of the man and the passing taste of carrot.

Presently he forgot about it and turned slowly round again so that his hindquarters were toward the door, because he usually stood that way, and after a minute or two he blinked slowly, rested his near hind leg lazily on the point of the hoof and lapsed back into twilight mindlessness.

Down in his stomach the liquid narcotic compound with which the carrot had been injected to saturation gradually filtered out of the digesting carrot cells and began to be absorbed into the bloodstream. The process was slow and progressive. And it had started two hours late.

Arthur Morrison stood in his stable yard watching his men load the chestnut into the motor horse-box that was to take him to the races. He was eyeing the proceedings with an expression that was critical from habit and bore little relation to the satisfaction in his mind. The chestnut was the best horse in his stable: a frequent winner, popular with the public, a source of prestige as well as revenue.

The big steeplechase at Cheltenham had been tailor-made for him from the day its conditions had been published, and Morrison was adept at producing a horse in peak condition for a particular race. No one seriously considered that the chestnut would be beaten. The newspapers had tipped it to a man, and the bookmakers were fighting shy at 6 to 4 on. Morrison allowed himself a glimmer of warmth in the eyes and a twitch of smile to the lips as the men clipped shut the heavy doors of the horse van.

These physical signs were unusual. The face Morrison normally wore was a compound of concentration and disapproval in roughly equal proportions. Both qualities contributed considerably to his success as a race-horse trainer and to his unpopularity as a person, a fact he was well aware of. He didn't in the least care that almost no one liked him. He valued success and respect much more highly than love and held in incredulous contempt all those who did not.

Across the yard Chick was watching the horse van drive away, his usual scowl in place. Morrison frowned irritably. The boy was a pest, he thought. Always grousing, always impertinent, always trying to scrounge up more money. Morrison didn't believe in boys having life made too easy: a little hardship was good for the soul.

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Where Morrison and Chick radically differed was the point at which each thought hardship began.

Chick spotted the frown and watched Morrison fearfully, his guilt pressing on him like a rock. He couldn't know, he thought frantically. He couldn't even suspect there was anything wrong with the horse or he wouldn't have let him go off to the races. The horse had looked all right, too. Absolutely his normal self. Perhaps there had been nothing wrong with the carrot. . .Perhaps it had been the wrong carrot, even. . .Chick glanced around uneasily and knew very well he was fooling himself. The horse might look all right but he wasn't.

Arthur Morrison saddled up his horse at the races, and Chick watched him from ten nervous paces away, trying to hide in the eager crowd that pushed forward for a close view of the favorite. There was a larger admiring crowd outside the chestnut's saddling stall than for any of the other seven runners, and the bookmakers had shortened their odds.

Behind Morrison's concentrated expression an itch of worry was growing insistent. He pulled the girth tight and adjusted the buckles automatically, acknowledging to himself that his former satisfaction had changed to anxiety. The horse was not himself. There were no lively stamping feet, no playful nips from the teeth, no response to the crowd; this was a horse that usually played to the public like a film star. He couldn't be feeling well, and if he wasn't feeling well he wouldn't win.

Morrison tightened his mouth. If the horse were not well enough to win, he would prefer him not to run at all. To be beaten at odds-on would be a disgrace. A defeat on too large a scale. A loss of face. Particularly as Morrison's own eldest son Toddy was to be the jockey.

Morrison came to a decision and sent for the vet.

The rules of jump racing in England stated quite clearly that if a horse had been declared a runner in a race, only the say-so of a veterinarian was sufficient grounds for withdrawing him during the last three-quarters of an hour before post time. The Cheltenham racecourse veterinarian came and looked at the chestnut and, after consulting with Morrison, led it off to a more private stall and took its temperature.

"His temperature's normal," the veterinarian assured Morrison.

"I don't like the look of him."

"I can't find anything wrong."

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"He's not well," Morrison insisted.

The veterinarian pursed his lips and shook his head. There was nothing obviously wrong with the horse, and he knew he would be in trouble himself if he allowed Morrison to withdraw so hot a favorite on such slender grounds. Not only that, this was the third application for withdrawal he'd had to consider that afternoon. He had refused both the others, and the chestnut was certainly in no worse a state.

"He'll have to run," the veterinarian said positively, making up his mind.

Morrison was furious and went raging off to find a steward, who came and looked at the chestnut and listened to the vet and confirmed that the horse would have to run whether Morrison liked it or not. Unless, that was, Morrison cared to involve the horse's absent owner in paying a heavy fine?

With a face of granite Morrison resaddled the chestnut, and a stable lad led him out into the parade ring, where most of the waiting public cheered and a few wiser ones looked closely and hurried off to hedge their bets.

With a shiver of dismay Chick saw the horse reappear and for the first time regretted what he'd done. That stupid vet, he thought violently. He can't see what's under his bloody nose, he couldn't see a barn at ten paces. Anything that happened from then on was the vet's fault, Chick thought. The vet's responsibility, absolutely. The man was a criminal menace, letting a horse run in a steeplechase with dope coming out of its eyeballs.

Toddy Morrison had joined his father in the parade ring and together they were watching with worried expressions as the chestnut plodded lethargically around the oval walking track. Toddy was a strong, stocky professional jockey in his late twenties, with an infectious grin and a generous view of life that represented a direct rejection of his father's. He had inherited the same strength of mind but had used it to leave home at 18 to ride races for other trainers, and had only consented to ride for his father when he could dictate his own terms. Arthur Morrison, in consequence, respected him deeply. Between them they had won a lot of races.

Chick didn't actually dislike Toddy, even though, as he saw it, Toddy stood in his way. Occasionally Arthur let Chick ride a race if Toddy had something better or couldn't make the weight. Chick had to share these scraps from Toddy's table with two or three

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other lads in the yard who were, though he didn't believe it, as good as he was in the saddle. But though the envy curdled around inside him and the snide remarks came out sharp and sour as vinegar, he had never actually come to hate Toddy.

There was something about Toddy that you couldn't hate, however good the reason. Chick hadn't given a thought to the fact that it would be Toddy who would have to deal with the effects of the carrot. He had seen no farther than his own pocket. He wished now that it had been some other jockey.

The conviction suddenly crystalized in Chick's mind as he looked at Toddy and Morrison standing there worried in the parade ring that he had never believed the chestnut would actually start in the race. The stranger, Chick said to himself, had distinctly told him the horse would be too sick to start. I wouldn't have done it, else, Chick thought virtuously. I wouldn't have done it. It's bloody dangerous, riding a doped steeplechaser. I wouldn't have done that to Toddy. It's not my fault he's going to ride a doped steeplechaser, it's that vet's fault for not seeing. It's that stranger's fault, he told me distinctly the horse wouldn't be fit to start. . .

Chick remembered with an unpleasant jerk that he'd been two hours late with the carrot. Maybe if he'd been on time the drug would have come out more and the vet would have seen. . .

Chick jettisoned this unbearable theory instantly on the grounds that no one can tell how seriously any particular horse will react to a drug or how quickly it will work, and he repeated to himself the comforting self-delusion that the stranger had promised him the horse wouldn't ever start—though the stranger had not, in fact, said any such thing. The stranger, who was at the races, was entirely satisfied with the way things were going and was on the point of making a great deal of money.

The bell rang for the jockeys to mount. Chick clenched his hands in his pockets and tried not to visualize what could happen to a rider going over jumps at 30 miles an hour on a doped horse. Chick's body began playing him tricks again: he could feel the sweat pricking down his back and the pulse had come back in his ears.

Supposing he told them, he thought. Supposing he just ran out there into the ring and told Toddy not to ride the horse, it hadn't a chance of jumping properly, it was certain to fall, it could kill him bloody easily because its reactions would be all shot to bits.

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Supposing he did. The way they'd look at him. His imagination blew a fuse and blanked out on that picture because such a blast of contempt didn't fit in with his overgrown self-esteem. He could not, could *not* face the fury they would feel.

And it might not end there. Even if he told them and saved Toddy's life, they might tell the police. He wouldn't put it past them. And he could end up in the dock. Even in jail. They weren't going to do that to him, not to *him*. He wasn't going to give them the chance. He should have been paid a higher salary. Paid more because he was worth more. If he'd been paid more, he wouldn't have needed to take the stranger's money. Arthur Morrison had only himself to blame.

Toddy would have to risk it. After all, the horse didn't look too bad, and the vet had passed it, hadn't he, and maybe the carrot being two hours late was all to the good and it wouldn't have done its work properly yet, it was really thanks to Chick if it hadn't; only thanks to him that the drug was two hours late and that nothing much would happen, really, anyway. Nothing much would happen. Maybe the chestnut wouldn't actually *win,* but Toddy would come through all right. Of course he would.

The jockeys swung up into their saddles, Toddy among them. He saw Chick in the crowd, watching, and sketched an acknowledging wave. The urge to tell and the fear of telling tore Chick apart like the Chinese trees.

Toddy gathered up the reins and clicked his tongue and steered the chestnut indecisively out onto the track. He was disappointed that the horse wasn't feeling well but not in the least apprehensive. It hadn't occurred to him, or to Arthur Morrison, that the horse might be doped.

He cantered down to the post standing in his stirrups, replanning his tactics mentally now that he couldn't rely on reserves in his mount. It would be a difficult race now to win. Pity.

Chick watched him go. He hadn't come to his decision, to tell or not to tell. The moment simply passed him by. When Toddy had gone he unstuck his leaden feet and plodded off to the stands to watch the race, and in every corner of his mind little self-justifications sprang up like nettles. A feeling of shame tried to creep in round the edges, but he kicked it out smartly. They should have paid him more. It was their fault, not his.

He thought about the wad of notes the stranger had given him with the carrot. Money in advance. The stranger had trusted him,

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which was more than most people seemed to. He'd locked himself into the bathroom and counted the notes, counted them twice, and they were all there, £300 just as the stranger had promised. He had never had so much money all at once in his life before. Perhaps he never would again, he thought. And if he'd told Arthur Morrison and Toddy about the dope, he would have to give up that money, give up the money and more.

Finding somewhere to hide the money had given him difficulty. Three hundred used £1 notes had turned out to be quite bulky, and he didn't want to risk his ma poking around among his things, like she did, and coming across them. He'd solved the problem temporarily by rolling them up and putting them in a brightly colored round tin which had once held toffees but which he used for years for storing brushes and polish for cleaning his shoes. He had covered the money with a duster and jammed the brushes back in on top and put the tin back on the shelf in his bedroom where it always stood. He thought he would probably have to find somewhere safer, in the end.

And he'd have to be careful how he spent the money—there would be too many questions asked if he just went out and bought a car. He'd always wanted a car. . .and now he had the money for one. . .and he still couldn't get the car. It wasn't fair. Not fair at all. If they'd paid him more. . .enough for a car. . .

Up on the well-positioned area of stands set aside for trainers and jockeys, a small man with hot dark eyes put his hand on Chick's arm and spoke to him, though it was several seconds before Chick started to listen.

". . .I see you are here, and you're free, so will you ride it?"

"What?" said Chick vaguely.

"My horse in the Novice Hurdle," said the little man impatiently. "Of course, if you don't want to—"

"Didn't say that," Chick mumbled. "Ask the guvnor. If he says I can, well, I can."

The small trainer walked across the stand to where Arthur Morrison was watching the chestnut intently through his race glasses and asked the same question he'd put to Chick.

"Chick? Yes, he can ride for you, if you want him." Morrison gave the other trainer two full seconds of his attention and glued himself back onto his race glasses.

"My jockey was hurt in a fall in the first race," explained the small man. "There are so many runners in the Novice Hurdle

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that there's a shortage of jockeys. I just saw that boy of yours, so I asked him on the spur of the moment, see?"

"Yes, yes," said Morrison, ninety percent uninterested. "He's moderately capable, but don't expect too much of him." There was no spring in the chestnut's stride. Morrison wondered in depression if he was sickening for the cough.

"My horse won't win. Just out for experience you might say," the man said.

"Yes. Well, fix it with Chick." Several other stables had the coughing epidemic, Morrison thought. The chestnut couldn't have picked a worse day to catch it.

Chick, who would normally have welcomed the offer of a ride with condescending complacency, was so preoccupied that the small trainer regretted having asked him. Chick's whole attention was riveted on the chestnut, who seemed to be lining up satisfactorily at the starting tape. Nothing wrong, Chick assured himself. Everything was going to be all right. Of course it was. Stupid getting into such a state.

The start was down the track to the left, with two fences to be jumped before the horses came past the stands and swung away again on the left-hand circuit. As it was a jumping race, they were using tapes instead of stalls, and as there was no draw either, Toddy had lined up against the inside rails, ready to take the shortest way home.

Down in the bookmakers' enclosure they were offering more generous odds now and some had gone boldly to evens. The chestnut had cantered past them on his way to the start, looking not his brightest and best. The bookmakers in consequence were feeling more hopeful. They had expected a bad day, but if the chestnut lost, they would profit. One of them would profit terrifically—just as he would lose terrifically if the chestnut won.

Alexander McGrant (Est. 1898), real name Harry Buskins, had done this sort of thing once before. He spread out his fingers and looked at them admiringly. Not a tremble in sight. And there was always a risk in these things that the boy he'd bribed would get cold feet at the last minute and not go through with the job. Always a gamble, it was. But this time, this boy, he was pretty sure of. You couldn't go wrong if you sorted out a vain little so-and-so with a big grudge. Knockovers, that sort were. Every time.

Harry Buskins was a shrewd middle-aged East End Londoner for whom there had never been any clear demarcation between

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right and wrong and a man who thought that if you could rig a nice little swindle now and then, well, why not? The turnover tax was killing betting—you had to make a quick buck where you could—and there was nothing quite as sure or quick as raking in the dough on a red-hot favorite and knowing for certain that you weren't going to have to pay out.

Down at the post the starter put his hand on the lever and the tapes went up with a rush. Toddy kicked his chestnut smartly in the ribs. From his aerie on top of the stand the commentator moved smartly into his spiel, "They're off, and the first to show is the gray."

Arthur Morrison and Chick watched with hearts thumping from different sorts of anxiety, and Harry Buskins shut his eyes and prayed.

Toddy drove forward at once into the first three, the chestnut beneath him galloping strongly, pulling at the bit, thudding his hooves into the ground. He seemed to be going well enough, Toddy thought. Strong. Like a train.

The first fence lay only 100 yards ahead now, coming nearer. With a practised eye Toddy measured the distance, knew the chestnut's stride would meet it right, collected himself for the spring, and gave the horse the signal to take off. There was no response. Nothing. The chestnut made no attempt to bunch his muscles, no attempt to gather himself onto his haunches, no attempt to waver or slow down or take any avoiding action whatsoever. For one incredulous second Toddy knew he was facing complete and imminent disaster.

The chestnut galloped straight into the three-foot-thick, chest-high solid birch fence with an impact that brought a groan of horror from the stands. He turned a somersault over the fence with a flurry of thrashing legs, threw Toddy off in front of him, fell down on top, and rolled over him.

Chick felt as if the world were turning gray. The colors drained out of everything and he was halfway to fainting. Oh, God, he thought. Oh, God. *Toddy.*

The chestnut scrambled to his feet and galloped away. He followed the other horses toward the second fence, stretching out into a relentless stride, into a full-fledged thundering racing pace.

He hit the second fence as straight and hard as the first. The crowd gasped and cried out. Again the somersault, the spreadeagled legs, the crashing fall, the instant recovery. The

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chestnut surged up again and galloped on.

He came up past the stands, moving inexorably, the stirrups swinging out from the empty saddle, flecks of foam flying back now from his mouth, great dark patches of sweat staining his flanks. Where the track curved round to the left, the chestnut raced straight on. Straight on across the curve, to crash into the rail around the outside of the track.

He took the solid timber across the chest and broke it in two. Again he fell in a thrashing heap and again he rocketed to his feet. But this time not to gallop away. This time he took three painful limping steps and stood still.

Back at the fence Toddy lay on the ground with first-aid men bending over him anxiously. Arthur Morrison ran down from the stands toward the track and didn't know which way to turn first, to his son or his horse. Chick's legs gave way and he sagged down in a daze onto the concrete steps.

And down in the bookmakers' first enclosure Harry Buskins' first reaction of delight was soured by wondering whether, if Toddy Morrison were badly injured, that stupid boy Chick would be scared enough to keep his mouth shut.

Arthur Morrison turned toward his son. Toddy had been knocked unconscious by the fall and had had all the breath squeezed out of him by the chestnut's weight, but by the time his father was within 100 yards he was beginning to come round. As soon as Arthur saw the supine figure move, he turned brusquely round and hurried off toward the horse: it would never do to show Toddy the concern he felt. Toddy would not respect him for it, he thought.

The chestnut stood patiently by the smashed rail, only dimly aware of the dull discomfort in the foreleg that wouldn't take his weight. Arthur Morrison and the veterinarian arrived beside him at the same time, and Arthur Morrison glared at the vet.

"You said he was fit to run. The owner is going to hit the roof when he hears about it."

Morrison tried to keep a grip on a growing internal fury at the injustice of fate. The chestnut wasn't just any horse—it was the best he'd ever trained, had hoisted him higher up the stakes-won list than he was ever likely to go again.

"Well, he seemed all right," said the vet defensively.

"I want a dope test done," Morrison said truculently.

"He's broken his shoulder. He'll have to be put down."

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"I know. I've got eyes. All the same, I want a dope test first. Just being ill wouldn't have made him act like that."

The veterinarian reluctantly agreed to take a blood sample, and after that he fitted the bolt into the humane killer and shot it into the chestnut's drug-dazed brain. The best horse in Arthur Morrison's stable became only a name in the record books. The digested carrot was dragged away with the carcass but its damage was by no means spent.

It took Chick ten minutes to realize that it was Toddy who was alive and the horse that was dead, during which time he felt physically ill and mentally pulverized. It had seemed so small a thing, in the beginning, to give a carrot to the chestnut. He hadn't thought of it affecting him much. He'd never dreamed anything like that could make you really sick.

Once he found that Toddy had broken no bones, had recovered consciousness, and would be on his feet in an hour or two, the bulk of his physical symptoms receded. When the small trainer appeared at his elbow to remind him sharply that he should be inside changing into colors to ride in the Novice Hurdle race, he felt fit enough to go and do it, though he wished in a way that he hadn't said he would.

In the changing-room he forgot to tell his valet he needed a lightweight saddle and that the trainer had asked for a breast girth. He forgot to tie the stock round his neck and would have gone out to ride with the ends flapping. He forgot to take his watch off. His valet pointed everything out and thought that the jockey looked drunk.

The novice hurdler Chick was to ride wouldn't have finished within a mile of the chestnut if the chestnut started the day before. Young, green, sketchily schooled, the novice hadn't even the virtue of a gold streak waiting to be mined: this was one destined to run in the ruck until the owner tired of trying.

Chick hadn't bothered to find out. He'd been much too preoccupied to look in the form book, where a consistent row of naughts might have made him cautious. As it was, he mounted the horse without attention and didn't listen to the riding orders the small trainer insistently gave him. As usual, he thought he knew better. Play it off the cuff, he thought scrappily. Play it off the cuff. How could he listen to fussy little instructions with all that he had on his mind?

On his way out from the weighing room he passed Arthur Mor-

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rison, who cast an inattentive eye over his racing colors and said, "Oh, yes. . .well, don't make too much of a mess of it."

Morrison was still thinking about the difference the chestnut's death was going to make to his fortunes and he didn't notice the spasm of irritation that twisted Chick's petulant face.

There he goes, Chick thought. That's typical. *Typical*. Never thinks I can do a bloody thing. If he'd given me more chances—and more money—I wouldn't have given. . .well, I wouldn't have. He cantered down to the post, concentrating on resenting that remark, "don't make too much of a mess of it," because it made him feel justified for having done what he'd done. The abyss of remorse opening beneath him was too painful. He clutched at every lie to keep himself out.

Harry Buskins had noticed that Chick had an unexpected mount in the Novice Hurdle and concluded that he himself was safe, the boy wasn't going to crack. All the same, he had shut his bag over its swollen takings and left his pitch for the day and gone home, explaining to his colleagues that he didn't feel well. And in truth he didn't. He couldn't get out of his mind the sight of the chestnut charging at those fences as if he couldn't see. Blind, the horse had been. A great racer who knew he was on a racetrack starting a race. Didn't understand there was anything wrong with him. Galloped because he was asked to gallop, because he knew it was the right place for it. A great horse, with a great racing heart.

Harry Buskins mopped the sweat off his forehead. They were bound to have tested the horse for dope, he thought, after something like that. None of the others he'd done in the past had reacted that way. Maybe he'd got the dose wrong or the timing wrong. You never knew how individual horses would be affected. Doping was always a bit unpredictable.

He poured himself half a tumbler of whiskey with fingers that were shaking, and when he felt calmer he decided that if he got away with it this time he would be satisfied with the cleanup he'd made, and he wouldn't fool around with any more carrots. He just wouldn't risk it again.

Chick lined up at the starting post in the center of the field, even though the trainer had advised him to start on the outside to give the inexperienced horse an easy passage over the first few hurdles. Chick didn't remember this instruction because he hadn't listened, and even if he had listened he would have done the

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same, driven by his habitual compulsion to disagree. He was thinking about Toddy lining up on this spot an hour ago, not knowing that his horse wouldn't see the jumps.

Chick hadn't known dope could make a horse blind. How could anyone expect that? It didn't make sense. Perhaps it was just that the dope had confused the chestnut so much that although its eyes saw the fence, the message didn't get through that he was supposed to jump over it. The chestnut couldn't have been really blind.

Chick sweated at the thought and forgot to check that the girths were still tight after cantering down to the post. His mind was still on the inward horror when the starter let the tapes up, so that he was caught unawares and flat-footed and got away slowly. The small trainer on the stand clicked his mouth in annoyance, and Arthur Morrison raised his eyes to heaven.

The first hurdle lay side by side with the first fence, and all the way to it Chick was illogically scared that his horse wouldn't rise to it. He spent the attention he should have given to setting his horse right in desperately trying to convince himself that no one could have given it a carrot. He couldn't be riding a doped horse himself—it wouldn't be fair. Why wouldn't it be fair? Because—because—

The hurdler scrambled over the jump, knocked himself hard on the timber frame, and landed almost at a standstill. The small trainer began to curse.

Chick tightened one loose rein and then the other, and the hurdler swung to and fro in wavering indecision. He needed to be ridden with care and confidence and to be taught balance and rhythm. He needed to be set right before the jumps and to be quickly collected afterward. He lacked experience, he lacked judgment, and he badly needed a jockey who could contribute both.

Chick could have made a reasonable job of it if he'd been trying. Instead, with nausea and mental exhaustion draining what skill he had out of his muscles, he was busy proving that he'd never be much good.

At the second fence he saw in his mind's eye the chestnut somersaulting through the air, and going round the bend his gaze wavered across to the broken rail and the scuffed-up patches of turf in front of it. The chestnut had died there. Everyone in the stable would be poorer for it. He had killed the chestnut, there was no

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avoiding it any more, he'd killed it with that carrot as surely as if he'd shot the bolt himself. Chick sobbed suddenly, and his eyes filled with tears.

He didn't see the next two hurdles. They passed beneath him in a flying blur. He stayed on his horse by instinct, and the tears ran down and were swept away as they trickled under the edge of his jockey's goggles.

The green hurdler was frightened and rudderless. Another jump lay close ahead, and the horses in front went clattering through it, knocking one section half over and leaving it there at an angle. The hurdler waited until the last minute for help or instructions from the man on his back and then in a muddled way dived for the leaning section, which looked lower to him and easier to jump.

From the stands it was clear to both the small trainer and Arthur Morrison that Chick had made no attempt to keep straight or to tell the horse when to take off. It landed with its forefeet tangled up in the sloping hurdle and catapulted Chick off over its head.

The instinct of self-preservation which should have made Chick curl into a rolling ball wasn't working. He fell through the air flat and straight, and his last thought before he hit was that that stupid little sod of a trainer hadn't schooled his horse properly. The animal hadn't a clue how to jump.

Chick woke up a long time later in a high bed in a small room. There was a dim light burning somewhere. He could feel no pain. He could feel nothing at all. His brain seemed to be floating in his head and his head was floating in space.

After a long time he began to believe that he was dead. He took the thought calmly and was proud of himself for his calm. A long time after that he began to realize that he wasn't dead. There was some sort of casing round his head, holding it cushioned. He couldn't move.

He blinked his eyes consciously and licked his lips to make sure that they at least were working. He couldn't think what had happened. His thoughts were a confused but peaceful fog.

Finally he remembered the carrot, and the whole complicated agony washed back into his consciousness. He cried out in protest and tried to move, to get up and away, to escape the impossible, unbearable guilt. People heard his voice and came into the room and stood around him. He looked at them uncomprehendingly. They were dressed in white.

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"You're all right, now," they said. "Don't worry, young man. You're going to be all right."

"I can't move," he protested.

"You will," they said soothingly.

"I can't feel anything. I can't feel my feet." The panic rose suddenly in his voice. "I can't feel my hands. I can't—move—my hands." He was shouting, frightened, his eyes wide and stretched.

"Don't worry," they said. "You will in time. You're going to be all right."

He didn't believe them, and they pumped a sedative into his arm to quiet him. He couldn't feel the prick of the needle. He heard himself screaming because he could feel no pain.

When he woke up again he knew for certain that he'd broken his neck.

After four days Arthur Morrison came to see him, bringing six new-laid eggs and a bottle of fresh orange juice. He stood looking down at the immobile body with the plaster cast round its shoulders and head.

"Well, Chick," he said awkwardly. "It's not as bad as it could have been, eh?"

Chick said rudely, "I'm glad you think so."

"They say your spinal cord isn't severed, it's just crushed. They say in a year or so you'll get a lot of movement back. And they say you'll begin to feel things any day now."

"They say," said Chick sneeringly. "I don't believe them."

"You'll have to, in time," said Morrison impatiently.

Chick didn't answer, and Arthur Morrison cast uncomfortably around in his mind for something to say to pass away the minutes until he could decently leave. He couldn't visit the boy and just stand there in silence. He had to say *something*. So he began to talk about what was uppermost in his mind.

"We had the result of the dope test this morning. Did you know we had the chestnut tested? Well, you know we had to have it put down anyway. The results came this morning. They were positive. *Positive*. The chestnut was full of some sort of narcotic drug, some long name. The owner is kicking up hell about it and so is the insurance company. They're trying to say it's my fault. My security arrangements aren't tight enough. It's ridiculous. And all this on top of losing the horse itself, losing that really great horse. I questioned everyone in the stable this morning as soon as I knew about the dope, but of course no one knew anything. God, if

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I knew who did it I'd strangle him myself."

It occurred to him at this point that Chick being Chick, he would be exclusively concerned with his own state and wouldn't care a damn for anyone else's troubles. Arthur Morrison sighed deeply. Chick did have his own troubles now, right enough. He couldn't be expected to care all that much about the chestnut. And he was looking very weak, very pale.

The doctor who checked on Chick's condition ten times a day came quietly into the small room.

"He's doing well," he said. "Getting on splendidly."

"Nuts," Chick said.

The doctor twisted his lips. He didn't say he had found Chick the worst-tempered patient in the hospital. He said, "Of course it's hard on him. But it could have been worse. It'll take time—he'll need to learn everything again, you see. It'll take time."

"Like a bloody baby," Chick said violently.

Arthur Morrison thought, a baby again. Well, perhaps second time around they could make a better job of him.

"He's lucky he's got good parents to look after him once he goes home," the doctor said.

Chick thought of his mother, forever chopping up carrots to put in the stew. He'd have to eat them. His throat closed convulsively. He knew he couldn't.

And then there was the money, rolled up in the shoe-cleaning tin on the shelf in his bedroom. He would be able to see the tin all the time when he was lying in his own bed. He would never be able to forget. Never. And there was always the danger his ma would look inside it. He couldn't face going home. He couldn't face it. And he knew he would have to. He had no choice. He wished he were dead.

Arthur Morrison sighed heavily and shouldered his new burden with his accustomed strength of mind. "Yes, he can come home to his mother and me as soon as he's well enough. He'll always have us to rely on."

Chick Morrison winced with despair and shut his eyes. His father tried to stifle a surge of irritation, and the doctor thought the boy an ungrateful little beast.

"Q"

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R. R. Irvine

Lobster Shift

This is the 382nd "first story" published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .Perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay this new writer is to say that when you read his "first story" you will feel—no, you will be convinced—that you are there. . .

The author, R. R. Irvine, "studied anthropology and art in college, spent two years in the U.S. Army as a counterintelligence agent, then entered the field of journalism in the classical manner—by writing obituaries on a small daily newspaper." Since then he has worked in both radio and television news, as a writer, producer, editor, and director, and later as news director of the ABC Network station in Los Angeles (Eyewitness News). Now he is devoting full time to writing . . .

There are simple rules for survival. Keep your mouth shut, do what you're told, pay your union dues on time, and keep your canary-eating grins down to a minimum. That's what it takes to be a successful television newsman, because it's just like any other business: politics and bootlicking get you ahead. And that's why my big mouth landed me on the lobster shift Monday, May 25th.

The date is stamped on my mind. It was the first day of my exile from the living, and the beginning of my nightmare.

I had trudged into the newsroom thirty minutes early, right into the middle of a screaming match between our anchorman, Al Aarons—we called him AA because of his drinking—and the Eleven O'Clock News producer, Jerry Green.

"You idiot!" Aarons yelled, his anchorman's voice booming in the nearly deserted newsroom.

"You're drunk. You're drunk now and you were drunk on the air." Green turned to me as if I were a referee.

AA licked his lips and fired a slur of obscenity. His eyes glittered. On camera his glassy peepers gave him a kind of charisma.

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"Go home and sleep it off," Green advised.

AA answered with more elaborate obscenities. Then, as if victorious, he lurched out of the newsroom. We could hear him stumbling down the hall, careening from wall to wall.

"I'm through," Green said. "I can't take any more of this, Jeff."

"You say that every time he gets drunk."

"I know." A twitch pulled at Green's pinched lips. "But one of these days he's going to pass out in front of the camera, and that will be the end of me."

"Of him, you mean," I consoled.

"You've been in this business long enough to know better than that."

Yeah, I said to myself, you've got ten years in the business, Jeff Simmons, and only the lobster shift to show for it.

"If he ever blows it on camera," Green continued, "I'll get blamed for letting him drink. I'll be the one to get canned. Aarons will end up with a raise."

I nodded. Like I said, it's politics and pretty faces in the television news business.

"Why don't you go out and get yourself a drink," I suggested. In a way that suggestion was responsible for everything that happened later.

Green tossed his stopwatch into the nearest drawer, slammed the drawer shut with a tinkle of crystal, then swore at the top of his voice, pitiful by comparison to AA's parting blast, but still formidable in the narrow confines of the newsroom. He sucked in a deep breath. "Jeff, you're right. I'm going to get out of here early. Do you mind if I leave without clearing the wires?"

"No. I'll take care of it. You get going."

"Thanks, Jeff." He forced a smile, then practically ran from the newsroom.

I sighed after him. Eight hours to go on the lobster shift, and about half a mile of teletype copy to pull for Jerry Green.

Of course, if he'd stayed I'd never have seen that first message. It had run at 11:23 P.M. Even at that I almost missed it. By the time I'd read through both United Press wires and the output from three Associated Press machines, the clatter of the wireroom had jangled my nerves and started a stabbing headache which turned me copy-blind.

I had just about decided to dump the National News Service copy and go down the hall for coffee and a couple of aspirins when

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my conscience caught up with me. I shrugged, clipped all twenty yards of the canary-yellow NNS paper, spun it into a tight roll, and carried it back to my already cluttered desk.

Since I had about a half hour of NNS ahead of me, I stocked up with two soggy cardboard cups of black coffee after swallowing the grimy aspirins I found loose in my pencil drawer.

Halfway through the second cup, with three feet of primary election analysis behind me, I ran across the first message.

HC
L548SR
IS FIRST STORY ACCEPTABLE? IF NOT, CONTACT SOONEST. URGENT
M363FF

Not much at first glance, but the HC caught my attention. HC is National News Service code for our area, Los Angeles.

Ever since my big scoop last year ("What have you done lately?" Bud Murch, the news director, had asked when he sentenced me to the lobster shift) I always check the HCs closely. An innocent-looking HC had got me an exclusive interview, thirty seconds of 16-millimeter color film, with the Vice President between planes at International Airport.

So, with a deep sigh for past glories, I reread the HC URGENT, filed it in my head for future reference, and plowed on through the rest of the wire copy, soon rubbing my eyes with the full conviction that the coming California primary election was an obsession with NNS. They told me more, much more than I wanted to know about it. Besides, everyone knew the big race, the one for senator, was no contest. Bobby Lundon was a cinch for the nomination and better than even money to knock off the incumbent, Wild Bill Bronson, in the November runoff.

Even old AA, who doubled as our political editor, had sadly predicted an end to the Bronson machine and to the free booze that Bronson sent him every month. Bronson's administration had been hit hard by one scandal after another in the past year. Even so, Wild Bill was still popular, and nobody but Bobby Lundon could beat him.

The next day, Tuesday, the answer came in on my shift, at 12:20 A.M.

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JN
M363FF
MONEY UNACCEPTABLE. STORY OFF IF NOT FORTHCOMING.
L548SR

That snapped me to attention. JN was code for Las Vegas, and I always think of Vegas in terms of money.

In the news business it's rare to pay for a story. You only put out for the big ones—I mean the really big ones—and then only as a last resort.

So with a smile, figuring we were about to get a free ride on an NNS scoop, I left a note asking Jerry Green to save the early NNS copy for me. I sure as hell didn't want to miss the next message if it happened not to come through on my shift.

I spent the rest of the early hours Tuesday drinking coffee and trying to work on my novel—yes, The Great American Novel. But I kept wondering what kind of story NNS—known for its low pay and cheap attitude—would pay big money for. By the time my shift ended at eight o'clock, I had accomplished little if anything, but then the lobster man wasn't expected to do very much. Actually, he's only there in case of a big news story, like a plane crash. Then he calls a film crew and gets a pat on the back from the boss, the guy who assigned him to the lobster shift in the first place.

Some people never can adjust to lobster-shift hours. That's why they figure you'll end up quitting and save them the trouble of trying to fire you and maybe touch off a union grievance.

I'm too damned obstinate to quit, and smart enough to know all the lobster man really has to do is stay awake, weed through the wires for bulletins, and talk to every crank who calls in. It's a newsroom rule: always talk to the cranks—maybe you'll get a big story one day. But I've never known anyone to get anything that way.

Once, maybe twice a year, the lobster man earns his salary by getting film of a plane crash or some other equally visual disaster.

Friday morning at 4:22 I thought I had earned my keep for the year.

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HC
L548SR
WE UP THE ANTE 10-THOUSAND
M363FF

Now, that's big money. Too big to be anything short of exclusive rights to World War Three.

I wrote the transmission numbers down in my notebook, then decided I couldn't just sit there waiting for it to break. Without thinking it through I grabbed the phone and called the downtown office of NNS.

Their lobster man came on with a tired drinker's voice. "Williams, National News Service."

"This is Jeff Simmons at Channel Three."

"Good for you," he croaked. He rattled when he spoke, as though from a hundred cigarettes a day.

I plunged in. "I've been watching those messages between LA and Vegas and I'd like to know what's up?" As soon as the question came out I knew it was a mistake. Play it cool, I told myself.

"What messages?" He sounded annoyed.

"Hell, you're talking to a pro, you know." I lost my cool. "I'm talking about the messages offering ten thousand dollars for a story."

"You must be crazy. National wouldn't pay that kind of money for the Armageddon."

My cool boiled. "Look, I can read. What are you trying to pull?"

"Hey, you're serious, aren't you? Well, I still don't know what you're talking about."

"Look at your wire for 4:22. What do you see?" I asked.

"Just a minute." A chair scraped, accompanied by a tired grunt. A couple of minutes later he said, "It's probably about something else altogether. It doesn't say anything about money. Hell, for that matter it could even be a bet—though that's strictly against the rules—sent by one of our operators to someone in Vegas."

"Unh-unh. That message is from Vegas to LA."

"Yeah, you're right," he said. "Still, I'm just the night man. You'd better call the boss later this morning."

I agreed. It would just stir up the man's imagination to question him further.

I hung up and thought about $10,000.

Since the weekend started for me at eight A.M., I typed a long

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note to Jerry Green outlining what I knew so far and suggesting that he contact the head of NNS. Maybe, as long as Channel Three was a paying subscriber to their news service, they would let us in on their scoop.

Jerry Green was waiting for me when I ambled into the newsroom at 12:05 Monday morning. He was perched on my desk like a quarrelsome towhee, his dangling feet thumping nervously against my typewriter stand.

"You're late," he announced.

"Either you're waiting for me," I quipped, "or you're twelve hours early for work."

"You and your big nose," he said.

"It's a nice nose," I said, fingering my snout lovingly.

"You should never stick it in where it belongs."

I grinned. "There's something wrong with the way you said that."

"I'm just quoting the law of survival in the news business."

"You're not that cynical," I said. "Not yet anyway."

"It's that story of yours. It's been bothering me all weekend. I kept dreaming about it."

"The messages, you mean?"

"Yes. National News Service claims there's nothing to them."

"What about the money?" I asked.

"They say it wasn't ten thousand dollars, but an order for a ten-thousand-word feature story on gambling in Las Vegas."

"Since when has a wire service run ten-thousand-word feature stories?"

Green waved his hands helplessly.

"Did you talk to the guy who sent the messages?" I said.

"No. I never got past the editor. Besides, how would I know who sent them?"

"Each teletype operator has a code number he signs his transmissions with."

"That's right. I'd forgotten about that," Green said. He shook his head in self-disgust.

I still couldn't figure why he'd come in to see me in the middle of the night. "Is that all you got, Jerry?"

He nodded. "That's it, Jeff."

"Why this special visit then? You could have left me a note."

Green's loud sigh ended in a shrug. "I don't know. I just don't trust NNS. I never have."

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I studied Green's pinched face. The hair on the back of my neck prickled to attention; instinct means survival in the news business. With a palms-up gesture I urged him to continue.

"I don't like the way they're handling the election for one thing," Green said.

"What do you mean, Jerry?"

"Hell, you know as well as I do that they're slanting everything against Bobby Lundon. They're backing Bronson."

"I hadn't noticed they were slanting it."

"Bronson's chief aide is a major stockholder in NNS, has been for the past year or so. I thought you knew that."

"No." I shook my head. "Still—"

"Don't take my word for it," Green snapped. "Read the wires for yourself tonight and see what I mean."

It was my turn to sigh. "Okay."

He hopped down from his perch. "I'm going home and try to get some sleep. I hope I don't dream about you and your story again." He started down the hall, then came back. "Hey, Jeff, leave me a note if you get anything more on this, will you?" He waved goodbye a second time.

I hung up my coat, stalled over a cup of tepid coffee, groaning out loud when I thought of what was ahead of me that morning. I wasn't disappointed either. The wire services had produced a good hundred yards of copy in honor of election eve—everything from personal portraits, including the inevitable family dog, to complete election schedules for the candidates. Bronson was headquartered at the Hilton; Lundon had chosen the less pretentious Sheraton.

When I finally reached the NNS copy I saw what Jerry Green had been talking about. The stories about Bronson used phrases like, "Bronson declared," "Bronson stated firmly," or "Bronson affirmed," while the Lundon copy read, "Lundon alleged" or "Lundon claimed." It was too subtle to influence an election, but it galled me just the same.

As I was about to dump NNS in the circular file, I spotted a byline by an old friend, Irv Scott, who had worked with me on my first newspaper. I called him at home at 4:30 in the morning.

"Who," I asked him when he had calmed down, "is M363FF in Las Vegas and who is L548SR in Los Angeles?"

"You mean you want to know tonight?" he asked.

"Sure. It's morning already and I'm at work."

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A stream of obscenities cleared the wax out of my ear. "I'll call you back," he grumbled finally.

At 4:55 I found another message.

HC
L548SR
HALF PAYMENT IN ADVANCE NOW AT PRE-ARRANGED LOCATION. REMAINDER UPON COMPLETION. SUGGEST SHERATON LOCATION.
M363FF

Five minutes later Irv Scott called back.

"What's all this about?" he asked, now fully awake.

I leveled with him.

"That's strange," he said. "We don't have any operators with those code numbers."

"Are you sure, Irv?"

"Well, I talked to our night man and he checked the transmission list. Half the stuff is run through a computer these days. Maybe it was just a mispunched number."

"Probably," I said. It had to be a very big story, I thought, if they weren't even letting their own people in on it. "Hell, maybe I got the numbers wrong," I lied. There didn't seem to be any reason to drag Scott in any further.

"Are you telling me everything?" Scott's voice sounded guarded.

"Yeah. You know as much as I do."

"Well, keep in touch," he said.

Forty minutes later the final message came through.

JN
M363FF
SHERATON IDEAL. THIS WILL BE LAST TRANSMISSION. SEND FINAL PAYMENT UPON COMPLETION.
L548SR

I stapled the last two messages together and left them in Jerry Green's mailbox.

When I walked into the newsroom shortly before midnight the next day, people were crammed everywhere. Channel Three's live election coverage was in full swing and would continue right up until the results were official.

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I poked in my cluttered mailbox and found a message from Irv Scott. He'd got the break of a lifetime and had been transferred to the NNS bureau in Washington, D.C. But I didn't have time to think about what I was reading then. The newsroom's organized insanity blotted out everything else.

Jerry Green, surrounded by writers and copy boys who shuffled nervously waiting to run bulletins from the newsroom to the broadcast studio, waved me over. Every telephone was in use; everyone seemed to be yelling at once. Jerry and I conversed at a shout.

"You get anything else?" he asked.

"I think more than I bargained for," I murmured.

"What?" he yelled.

"No, nothing," I said. "But I plan to do some more checking when things quiet down around here." My eyes swept around the frenzied newsroom.

"We'll be out of your way pretty soon. Lundon's got it locked up. His victory speech is due in about ten minutes."

I nodded and then strolled over to an empty desk in the corner. The lobster man never has much to do election night, just clean up the mess after everyone else has gone home.

Feet up, coffee at my elbow, I settled back to watch the bank of big color-TV sets, each monitoring one of our competitors. The volume on Channel Three had been cranked wide open. You couldn't actually hear the words, but you could get the drift of things.

Lundon was on his way to the podium to accept the nomination.

I didn't really hear the shot, but I could tell something was wrong immediately. On the screen people moved wildly and screamed. In the newsroom there was stunned silence as veterans and copy boys alike gaped at the row of flickering screens; each showed Lundon close-up, slumped over the podium, blood spilling from his ear.

Over the picture Al Aarons' voice wavered: "The scene at the Sheraton is total chaos—"

The word screamed in my brain, echoing: "SHERATON. . .SHERATON."

The messages on NNS had been arrangements for an assassination. But I had been too stupid to see it. You're nuts, I told myself. Still, phones can be tapped, letters opened, conversations overheard. The safest way just might be right out in the open

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where no one would pay any attention to them—no one, that is, but a disgruntled lobster man looking for a way to get back on the day shift.

I squinted across the newsroom, now just beginning to come back to life, and caught Green's eye. His lips were pressed into a grim white line, his head canted to one side. He, too, had guessed the meaning of the messages.

I didn't have time to talk with him until eight o'clock that morning. By then Lundon was dead and a single suspect was in custody. The press knew nothing about the suspect yet, not even his name.

Jerry Green and I knew he was part of a conspiracy.

"Jerry," I said, "I think we'd better save those messages."

He nodded. "They're in your mailbox. I put them there after I read them."

"That's funny. I didn't notice them when I came in."

They weren't in my mailbox.

"Maybe they fell out and were swept up," he suggested.

"Maybe." I shook my head. Neither of us believed it; we looked around the newsroom suspiciously.

I cornered the office secretary. "Has anyone been here from NNS in the last few hours?"

"Not this morning," she said. "But there was somebody last night. A man came to fix the machine. It went on the blink about eleven o'clock."

Green stared at me helplessly.

At the arraignment and subsequent press conference District Attorney John Rasdale said, "Our investigation indicates that this was the act of a single individual, a man named Edgar Young."

I saw his statement after the fact when Green ran the 16-millimeter film of the press conference for me.

"We just can't sit on our hands and forget about it," I said. "We've got to do something."

"What? This is too big for us."

"Jerry, we're going to the D.A."

"Not me," said Green. "Bronson is a cinch for senator now. I don't want to get involved in politics."

"Politics! This is murder."

"Look, Jeff, you're already on the lobster shift. You don't have anything to lose. But it's taken me a long time to make producer."

"You should never have left the union."

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"Leave me out of it," he said.

"Okay, Jerry. Okay." I waved my hands in disgust. "I'll go it alone."

The D.A. tried to intimidate me. He greeted me in a trout-gray suit and rainbow tie and shook hands like a politician, with a steady pressure to one side as if I were taking up too much of his time.

I told him about the messages.

Over the top of steel-rimmed glasses he gave me the fish-eye, shook his head doubtfully, then picked up the phone and called Wild Bill Bronson's special aide, the one who owned most of National News Service. The D.A. repeated my accusation, nodded to something I couldn't hear, and hung up quickly.

"Well," Rasdale said, swinging his big leather desk chair back in my direction, "I hope you're not trying to say Bill Bronson is somehow mixed up in this?"

"You're damn right I am," I snapped. Me and my big mouth. I'd forgotten Rasdale wanted to run for governor in two years and would need Bronson's help for that.

When he clicked his tongue derisively I got mad. "Look, I'm telling you there was a conspiracy to kill Lundon. Edgar Young may have been one of them, I don't know, but he's a small fish."

"We have witnesses who saw him shoot Lundon. It was even on television."

"I know."

"Anyone else believe your story?" the D.A. asked.

"You're damn right. Jerry Green, who produces the Eleven O'Clock News for Channel Three."

"Why isn't he here?" asked Rasdale.

"He doesn't want to get involved."

The next day they fired Jerry Green—two weeks' pay in lieu of notice and out the door. They couldn't touch me because of the union. Green left town the same day.

It was a bigger conspiracy than I thought.

The prosecution didn't want me for a witness, so I told my story to Young's attorney, a high-powered lawyer from Northern California who had been attracted by the publicity.

I don't think he believed me—at least, he never said so—but he put me on the stand just the same.

Channel Three didn't like the whole thing either; but Murch talked with me the day before I was scheduled to testify. "Sim-

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mons," he warned, "politics and news don't mix."

But what could he do? He didn't have anything worse than the lobster shift to threaten me with. (The newswriters' union is a force to be reckoned with in Los Angeles.)

I told Murch just that. Me, the big mouth again.

My testimony shook the jury momentarily. Everyone in court could see that, including the prosecution. All the newsmen covering the trial began to fidget, waiting to see what the Deputy D.A., a man in line for promotion to the top spot if and when Rasdale made governor, would try against me.

He countered with Murch. He was Channel Three's news director, the Deputy D.A. pointed out, a veteran journalist, highly respected in his profession.

"Mr. Murch," he began, "did you know about these so-called messages on National News Service?"

"No, I did not." Murch pronounced each word carefully, emphatically.

"As news director would you normally be informed about such things?"

"I certainly would. That is, if my people were doing their job."

"I take it that you mean it is policy at Channel Three to keep the news director informed about all major stories?"

"Yes, I do," Murch answered.

"Did Mr. Simmons so inform you?" The Deputy D.A. was laying it on pretty thick.

"No, he did not," Murch said.

"What kind of newsman," the Deputy D.A. asked, "do you consider Mr. Simmons to be?"

"He's on the lobster shift," Murch said. "That's where we put people who aren't good enough for the daytime operation."

Or who don't kiss your feet, I thought.

But that did it—it sunk my testimony.

However, the Deputy D.A. didn't take any chances. He called the editor of National News Service to the stand. Without a qualm the man said, "There were a couple of messages on the wire about a feature story on gambling." He produced twenty feet of yellow paper. "Here's a copy of it." He shrugged elaborately.

There was no way I could prove him a liar.

The trial dragged on through the first week of September. Even without my credibility, Edgar Young got off with diminished capacity and was sent to a state mental hospital.

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I, of course, had been given a stiffer sentence—the lobster shift without a hope of parole.

With the November election only three weeks away Wild Bill Bronson is already talking victory. His press aides have leaked stories that he is line for the Vice Presidency, or even the *big job* in two more years.

The lobster shift seems more lonely than ever. By the time I get in, the new Eleven O'Clock producer is always gone, so I never see anyone except an occasional janitor.

I feel vulnerable, alone there in the newsroom from midnight to eight, knowing they are out to get me.

So every morning I tell myself, fingers crossed, that I'm not really worth the trouble. Why kill me? I'm too small potatoes to be a threat. But with a conspiracy that may even involve the *big job* itself, the stakes are fantastic, so no threat is too small. And I have a reputation for a big mouth.

A heart attack in the newsroom wouldn't be hard to fake. They'd find me in the morning at the end of the lobster shift. NNS would report it that way, and even follow it up with a brief obit; they do that for every dead newsman.

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Michael Gilbert

The Curious Conspiracy

Of all the contents of a lawyer's archives this is perhaps the most curious "musty, dusty" record—the grand story of Grandmother Clatterwick and her faithful retainer, Mr. McGuffog, and of the curious goings-on during those last years at Hambone Manor . . . .

When I qualified as a solicitor, one of the first clients I took on was Grandmother Clatterwick. I did so with some trepidation. I was a young lawyer and she was a formidable old lady, as tough and straight as one of the whalebone inserts in her own corsets. Surprisingly we got on well together. My mother, who died in the same year as my father, had been her youngest and favorite daughter, and I think some of the affection washed off on me.

As the years went by, it became a source of sadness to me to see Grandmother's estate diminish. Not that there was any question of her sinking into poverty. Her husband, Herbert Clatterwick, had been a strange silent man who had known nothing about anything except South American mining shares; but he had understood them well enough to make a comfortable fortune on the Stock Exchange, all of which was left to his widow, along with Hambone Manor and its park. Unfortunately the money was all unearned income and as taxation bit into it more and more deeply, pieces of the park had to be sold, wings of the Manor shut off, and servants dismissed or not replaced.

In the end Grandmother Clatterwick lived in the south wing, attended only by the faithful McGuffog and assisted by a couple of villagers who came up by day.

McGuffog had started life at the Manor as gardener's boy, had graduated through the pantry to assistant butler, and was now butler, gardener, and handyman combined. When I went down, as I did from time to time, to talk business and stayed overnight, McGuffog would wait on the two of us, through an elaborate meal.

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After dinner he would bring the coffee into the drawing room, place a log on the fire, inquire whether anything else was wanted, and retire to the rooms which had been fitted out for him over the stable. There were, in fact, a dozen bedrooms he could have used in the house itself, but when the last of the resident servants left, my grandmother's sense of propriety would not allow her to sleep alone in the house with a man. She was 75 at the time.

All these thoughts and memories of my grandmother were in my mind as we sat round the desk in my office that spring morning a week after her funeral.

The aunts were all there. Aunt Gertrude, a dry and intellectual spinster; Aunt Valerie, who had married Dr. Moffat and produced two ghastly children called George and Mary; and Aunt Alexandra, who had married a Major Lumsden and bought him out of the cavalry to listen to her talk.

"*Why* did she leave no will?" said Aunt Alexandra. "You were her solicitor. It was surely your duty to see that she made one. Isn't that what lawyers are for?"

"Don't be absurd," said Aunt Gertrude. "As if anyone, let alone her own grandson, could have persuaded mother to do anything she didn't wish to do."

"Does it make any difference?" said Aunt Valerie. "As I understand the law—you must correct me if I'm wrong, dear—her money is divided into four equal shares. Not that I mind for myself. I was thinking only of George and Mary."

Aunt Gertrude cackled sardonically. It was well known in the family that Valerie excused any personal selfishness by passing it on, second-hand, to her revolting children.

I took over to prevent a fight.

"That's quite correct. The property passes to the children equally, per stirpes. That—"

"No need to explain," said Aunt Gertrude. "I haven't forgotten the Latin I learned at school"—and she shot a glance at her sisters which implied quite clearly that she suspected they had.

"How much will the estate amount to?" inquired Dr. Moffat.

"It's difficult to say. Estate duty will account for a slice of it. And the Manor will have to be sold."

"No one will give a penny for it," said Aunt Gertrude. "A rambling old place in a shocking state of repair."

"What about stocks and shares and things like that?" asked Aunt Valerie.

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I said, "Granny had been using up capital quite a bit during recent years. Not so much since we bought her that annuity—that cost capital too, of course. But there must be quite a lot left. And although we may not get much for the Manor there were one or two nice things in it. It's a couple of years since I've been down there, but I remember an attributed Morland in the drawing room. That was insured for £5000. And I think there was an Etty in the dining room."

"*I* was somewhat more regular in my visits," said Dr. Moffat reprovingly.

"For George and Mary's sake," said Aunt Gertrude under her breath.

"—and I was actually there a fortnight before her decease. It struck me that she had become rather eccentric. We had a good dinner, as usual, but what do you suppose we were offered to drink with it?"

None of us could guess.

"A very large bottle of raspberry wine."

I could hardly conceal my delight. My uncle is the complete wine snob. By this I mean that he reads books about wine, belongs to all the wine societies, has a cupboard full of wine lists and the catalogues of wine auctions, talks endlessly about vintages and *crus*—and has less taste and discernment than a camel. On one occasion when we had him to dinner I emptied a bottle of red wine, which I had bought for two francs fifty at a grocer's shop in France, into an old Château Margaux bottle which I happened to have, and received the warmest commendation of my choice. "Superb bouquet, my boy. One can almost taste the violets in it." I could visualize exactly his expression when he was offered a bottle of raspberry wine.

"Apparently," said Aunt Valerie, "she had been making quite a thing of it. McGuffog, who had been helping her to brew it, told us that she had more than two thousand bottles of it in the cellar."

"Of raspberry wine?"

"Not all raspberry. There was raspberry, plum, and turnip wine, black currant and red currant cordial, and elderflower champagne. And half a dozen other nauseating brews too, I don't doubt."

Major Lumsden was a silent man, as anyone would be who was married to my Aunt Alexandra, but he had a kind heart. He said,

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"Talking about that fellow McGuffog, are we going to do anything for him?"

"I was thinking about that," I said. "He looked after granny for more than forty years. If I could have persuaded her to make a will I'm sure she'd have left him something."

"But she didn't make a will," said Aunt Valerie sharply.

"All the same—" said the Major.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I had a letter from McGuffog only this morning. I won't bother to read it all to you, although it's surprisingly well composed—"

"He must be reasonably competent," said Aunt Valerie. "After all, he used to manage a very large household. Larger than any of *us* have had to deal with."

"Quite so," I said. "Well, this is the passage I wanted to read you: 'I realize that Mrs. Clatterwick didn't approve of will making. She often told me so. There couldn't therefore be any question of a legacy. However—' "

As I turned the page I was aware of five pairs of eyes on me. One pair sardonic, one kindly, the other three pairs frankly greedy.

" '—it did occur to me to wonder whether the family would agree to me taking over the unused stock of homemade wine. I cooperated with Mrs. Clatterwick in getting together what must, I venture to think, be a unique collection of vintages—' "

"If *that's* all he wants," said Aunt Valerie, striving to keep the relief out of her voice, "I should be the first to agree."

The others nodded. Major Lumsden said, "Don't you think that some sort of pension—" But he was quickly and decisively overruled.

"All right," I said, "I'll tell him. He can store it in the old stable. And I assume you'll let him stay on in his flat until the house is sold?"

"If the people who buy the house have got an atom of sense," said Aunt Gertrude, "they'll take McGuffog with the house. Servants like that don't grow on trees."

The winding up of an intestate estate, particularly the estate of an old and secretive lady, is not a quick matter. But as the months slipped by and the answers came in from banks and stockbrokers and insurance companies, I began to feel the first stirrings of unease. There was so much less in the estate than I had expected.

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It was true, as I had told her daughters, that Grandmother Clatterwick had been nibbling into capital for years. But when I finally persuaded her to put £40,000 into a life annuity, this had insured her an almost tax-free income in the high thousands—enough, one would have thought, even for a Victorian old lady who liked to double the parson's stipend and to support charities with objects as diverse as the clothing of Eskimo babies and the moral rearmament of Hottentot girls.

Moreover, when I had bought the annuity I had made a very careful check of what money and securities were left, and the total was not far short of £20,000. Now, I could locate barely half of it.

The final blow fell in the early autumn when I got the schedule of the contents of Hambone Manor. I rang up the appraiser.

I said, "Why have you left out the Morland and the Etty?"

"I left them out," said the appraiser, "because they weren't there. The old man who looks after the place—McGuffog, that's the name—told me they were put up at auction about eighteen months ago. The Morland wasn't signed, so it only fetched two thousand. The Etty went for one and a half."

It was then I decided I would have to look into the matter personally.

Hambone Street lies in the miraculously still unravaged piece of Kent to the south of the A20. It has villages which still *are* villages, which possess things like village greens on which the local cricket team plays, village halls for the Women's Institute, and not less than three public houses for a population of four hundred and fifty. Lack of a rail service has helped to keep it the way it is, and I drove down by car on a lovely autumn morning when the leaves were just beginning to turn.

I found the Manor in sad decline. The grass was uncut, the hedges were straggling, and there were unfilled potholes in the driveway. This was disappointing. The estate had continued to pay McGuffog's salary on the understanding that he did some work on the grounds. It looked as though he had fallen down on the job.

However, there was someone in the house. Smoke was coming from one of the chimneys and the front door was open. I found Annie, one of the two village women, in possession. She had been told to keep the house as clean and dry as possible, and I could see she, at least, was doing a good job of it. When I asked her

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about McGuffog she looked startled.

"Didn't they tell you?" she said. "He passed away. They should have let you know, sir."

"I'm terribly sorry," I said. "When did it happen?"

"Two weeks ago it was. They laid him to rest on Sunday. A nice service. Vicar's been very helpful too. He left no family, you see. Only a cousin, or some such, who lives over in Essex. If you'd like a word with Mr. Stacey I saw his car in the yard. Likely he'll be over there now."

I walked across to the stable and introduced myself to the Reverend Stacey, who was coming down the stairs which led to McGuffog's flat. He was a cheerful young man with the well-scrubbed face and no-nonsense look that Theological Colleges turn out nowadays. He said, "I'm glad you're here. I thought of getting in touch with you. Not that there's much for a lawyer to do. All the stuff in the flat was borrowed from the house, you know. With Mrs. Clatterwick's agreement, of course. But it belonged to her, not to McGuffog. Almost the only things he left were the clothes he stood up in. Oh, and the remains of the wine."

"The remains?"

"He seems to have got rather fond of it. Rather too fond, perhaps." The vicar gave an unclerical chuckle. "People in the village used to hear him singing. Fortunately they couldn't make out the words, so they assumed it was Gaelic."

"*Can* you get drunk on raspberry wine?"

"I expect you can get drunk on anything, if you try hard enough. McGuffog certainly put his back into it. He took over nearly two thousand bottles of it—"

"Nineteen hundred and eighty-four," said Annie who had joined us. "I helped him store them in the hayracks in the stable."

"When he died there were just about fifteen hundred left."

I did some mental arithmetic. The period between my grandmother's death and McGuffog's was not much more than twenty weeks. Call it a hundred and fifty days. At three bottles a day he could just have done it.

Annie said unexpectedly, "I reckon he looked on it as a duty."

We both stared at her. She blushed and then said, rather defiantly, "Well, there's no harm in me telling you. They've both gone now. But they sometimes used to share a bottle in the evenings. I know, because I came back once and saw them. There was a bottle of raspberry wine on the table and they were taking a glass

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each. I reckon they used to do it most evenings, when they were alone. Being homemade wine seemed to make it all right. It wasn't really *drinking*, you see."

I saw exactly what she meant. If it had been real drink it would have been an orgy. As it was elderflower champagne or plum cordial it was simply a charming, old-fashioned ritual. I said, "I think it was a beautiful idea. You mean that McGuffog had such pleasant memories of those evenings with my grandmother that he thought it his duty to finish off the whole stock rather than let it fall into the hands of uncaring outsiders."

"Death cut him down before he could accomplish it," said the vicar. "Sad."

"Talking of outsiders, what have you done with the balance of the stuff?"

The vicar said, "The cousin from Essex suggested that we give it to the Women's Institute. They'll be selling it off at their jumble sale this afternoon. I was on my way there. Perhaps you'd like to come along."

While we were talking we had drifted into the stable—a fine old-fashioned accommodation for eight horses, with deep hayracks. Annie spotted something in the corner. She said, "There now. They've forgotten that one. It must have got hidden in the straw."

It was a claret bottle of the green-glass type used by some Bordeaux shippers for a few years after the War when supplies were scarce, but now uncommon. A label in Grandmother Clatterwick's spidery writing identified the contents as damson wine.

"Don't you think," I said, "that it would be a fitting gesture if we drank a last toast, a farewell salute to a gallant old lady?"

"An excellent idea," said the vicar, adding, "the later I arrive at that jumble sale the less I shall have to spend."

Annie fetched glasses and a corkscrew. It was while I was in the act of drawing the cork that a great many questions were posed—and a few answered.

The first thing that struck me was that the cork was remarkably firm. Amateur bottlers do not usually manage to sink the whole of the cork into the neck of the bottle. The next was that it was an old cork, stiff with age and impregnated with the lees of the wine. Now this was really curious. Not only was the cork clearly twenty or thirty years old, but it was equally clear that it had spent those twenty or thirty years *in that bottle.*

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I carried the bottle to the door to examine it more closely. Imprinted into its side was the name of one of the four finest Châteaux in the Haut-Médoc.

I went back, picked up the tumbler which Annie had filled for me, and held it up to the light.

The vicar had already tasted his. "Remarkable damsons," he said.

I gave the tumbler a twist and watched the thick dark red liquid cling to the sides of the glass and slide away. Then I tasted it—and all my suspicions became facts.

The vicar, who had put his glass down, said, "Hold on a moment. I wonder if this will help us."

He went across to his car and came back with an exercise book. "I found it in McGuffog's flat. I was going to send it on to his cousin."

I opened the book. The writing I recognized as McGuffog's. I only needed a single glance at it. "When did you say that jumble sale was due to start?"

"It's started—half an hour ago."

"Where is it being held?"

"Take you in my car. It'll be quicker than explaining."

"Thank you," I said, "and if you'll excuse the expression, padre, drive like hell."

There were half a dozen cars parked outside the Village Hall, a crowd of women, most of them with perambulators and pushcarts, and a lot of children skirmishing round the flanks. We pushed in and the vicar introduced me to a tweedy lady whose name I never got. He said, "This is Mrs. Clatterwick's grandson." I admired his tact. It was a better introduction than "her solicitor." "He's interested in his grandmother's homemade wines."

The tweedy lady beamed at me. She said, "I'd have recognized you anywhere. You've got the family nose. Yes. It was kind of McGuffog's cousin to think of us. We've been doing quite a brisk trade."

My feelings must have been apparent. The tweedy lady said, "There's a good deal left, though. I had them all put together over here."

On and under the long trestle tables normally devoted to village teas stood the bottles, rank upon rank. "I had intended," I said, "to make you an offer for the lot. As a collection, you know."

"That's a nice idea," said the tweedy lady. "This gentleman is

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old Mrs. Clatterwick's grandson, Cynthia. He wanted to buy all the homemade wine. In memory of his grandmother. Has much of it gone already?"

Cynthia consulted a list. "Mrs. Parkin had a bottle. And Mrs. Batchelor had two. But the only other lot was Colonel Nicholson. *He* took six dozen."

I was making a rapid count of the bottles assisted by the fact that they were arranged in orderly groups of twenty-five. I said, "That's right. Fourteen hundred and twenty-five bottles—"

"They took *hours* to arrange," said Cynthia.

"What were you selling them at?"

"We had them down at sixpence a bottle," said the tweedy lady. "But we could give you a discount if you really are taking the lot."

"Far from it," I said. "A complete collection is always worth more than its individual parts." I wrote out a check for £100. "Who shall I make it out to?"

"A *hundred* pounds," said Cynthia, who had also been doing some arithmetic. "But that's nearly three times—"

"I'm sure my grandmother—and Mr. McGuffog—would have wanted it that way," I said. "I'll make all the arrangements for transporting the bottles. Please don't think of disturbing them. Leave it just as it is. If you'll excuse me a moment—"

Outside the hall I collared two intelligent-looking small boys. I said, "Would you like to earn half a crown?" The less intelligent boy nodded at once. The brighter one said, "What for?"

"One of you find Mrs. Parkin and one of you find Mrs. Batchelor—do you know them?"

The boys nodded.

"I want to buy back the bottles of homemade wine they bought here this afternoon. Here's five shillings each. See how cheaply you can buy them back—you can keep the change."

The two boys scudded off. I went to look for the vicar.

"Last lap," I said. "Can you take me to Colonel Nicholson's house?

"Almost as quick to walk," said the vicar. "That path through the spinney there will bring you to his back lawn. Watch out for his dog, though. He's quite all right if you don't make any sudden movements."

I arrived at the colonel's front door followed by a Doberman pinscher. I refrained from making any sudden movements and

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rang the bell. It was the colonel himself who opened the door. No doubt about that. A tall man with guileless light-blue eyes and a silky white mustache. When I had introduced myself he said, "Ah, yes. Come along in. I was half expecting a visit."

He led me through into the dining room. An agreeable apartment, full of polished mahogany and sparkling glass and shining silver. One of the bottles I had come for was standing on the sideboard. The cork had been drawn and there was a glass beside it.

"I don't normally drink wine at four in the afternoon," said the colonel. "But this was by way of being an experiment."

He brought out a second glass from the cupboard and proceeded to fill them both. I was glad to see that he did this properly, tilting the bottle slowly but firmly, with no sudden movements. The Doberman pinscher would have approved.

He said, "About nine months ago—it would have been around the turn of the year—I had the pleasure of having dinner with your grandmother. It must, I suppose, have been one of the very last dinner parties she gave. We drank a *remarkable* red currant cordial. I made up my mind that I must at all costs obtain the recipe from her or from her man, McGuffog, who had, I was told, assisted her in brewing it."

His eyes twinkling frostily, the colonel picked up his glass, sniffed at it, tilted it delicately, and took a sip. I followed suit.

"Unfortunately she died before I could do so. And I did not like to intrude on McGuffog who seems to have led a somewhat hermitlike if happy existence for the last six months of his life."

"Musical, too," I said.

We drank again, and the colonel continued. "When, however, I learned that the wines were for sale I hurried down and purchased some. I fully intended, if they came up to my expectations—as, indeed this one does, let me refill your glass—to go back and make an offer for the lot."

"Too late," I said. "I've bought them for the estate."

"I feared as much."

"And I'd like to buy back the six dozen you have."

The colonel considered the matter, stroking his mustache delicately with the tip of his little finger. Then he said, "I'll make a deal with you. You can buy back four dozen at the price I gave for them. I'll keep two dozen as a memento—that is, if you'll tell me the whole story."

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"I'm not sure I know the whole story," I said. "A lot of it will be guessing. What I *think* happened is that my grandmother and McGuffog, both rather lonely people by that time, got into the way of splitting a bottle in the evening. But in order to avoid offending my grandmother's rather strict sense of propriety, it had to be something which sounded harmless and old-fashioned."

"Like raspberry wine?"

"Exactly. Unfortunately, the only thing they both liked and appreciated were good French and German wines."

"I wouldn't call it unfortunate," said the colonel, refilling our glasses. "Was it all as good as this?"

I took the exercise book from my brief case and showed it to the colonel, who riffled through the pages.

"Glory be," he said ecstatically, "it must have cost her a fortune."

"Not a whole fortune—nine or ten thousand pounds."

"There's a page full of Private-Estate-bottled Trockenbeeren Auslese Hock. That must have set them back fifteen pounds a bottle. What did they call that?"

"I think that was called elderflower champagne."

"They seem to have chosen their stuff very well. I see they avoided the '47 clarets and stuck to the '45's and '49's. Sound judgment that."

"It would be McGuffog who did the buying. He'd had a good deal of experience."

"Ah," said the colonel. "*That's* what I was looking for. Domaine de la Romanée Conti. They've got some of the Richebourg '29. Do you think that could possibly be what we're drinking now?"

" '29 or '34," I said. "This is certainly one of the finest Burgundies I've ever tasted."

The third glass of a triumphant Burgundy induces contemplation and dispenses with the necessity for small talk. As we drank in silence I reflected on the real motives behind that curious conspiracy between Grandmother Clatterwick and Mr. McGuffog. Undoubtedly they both liked good wine. And undoubtedly the relabeling of a princely claret as raspberry wine and watching my Uncle Moffat turn his nose up at it must have appealed sharply to their sense of humor.

But I felt there was more to it than that. Like most very old and fairly rich people my grandmother must have been conscious of her next of kin like jackals sitting around a dying lion, licking

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their chops and waiting to get their teeth in. As each night the log fire flickered in the grate and another great wine sank in its bottle, must there not have been a feeling akin to triumph? Another ten pounds salvaged from Gertrude, Valerie, and Alexandra. Another crust out of the mouths of little George and Mary.

A further thought occurred to me. Might this not account for the heroic efforts of McGuffog after her death? His sensibility would not, of course, have allowed him to destroy such wine, but if it could all be consumed—?

The colonel seemed to have read my thoughts.

"I'm told," he said, "that McGuffog was averaging three to four bottles a day. I suppose that's really what finished him off."

"I fear it must have been."

"What a *wonderful* way to go!"

"Q"

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Patricia Highsmith

Sauce for the Goose

Loren had read about such people. They were different from the accident-prone—they were the suicide-prone. And in a house that was full of death traps, a jinx house, anything could happen . . . A story that will make you feel cold inside . . .

The incident in the garage was the third near-catastrophe in the Amory household, and it put a horrible thought into Loren Amory's head: his darling wife Olivia was trying to kill herself.

Loren had pulled at a plastic clothesline dangling from a high shelf in the garage—his idea had been to tidy up, to coil the clothesline properly—and at that first tug an avalanche of suitcases, an old lawnmower, and a sewing machine weighing God-knows-how-much crashed down on the spot that he barely had time to leap from.

Loren walked slowly back to the house, his heart pounding at his awful discovery. He entered the kitchen and made his way to the stairs. Olivia was in bed, propped against pillows, a magazine in her lap. "What was that terrible noise, dear?"

Loren cleared his throat and settled his black-rimmed glasses more firmly on his nose. "A lot of stuff in the garage. I pulled just a little bit on a clothesline—" He explained what had happened.

She blinked calmly as if to say, "Well, so what? Things like that do happen."

"Have you been up to that shelf for anything lately?"

"Why, no. Why?"

"Because—well, everything was just poised to fall, darling."

"Are you blaming me?" she asked in a small voice.

"Blaming your carelessness, yes. I arranged those suitcases up there and I'd never have put them so they'd fall at a mere touch. And I didn't put the sewing machine on top of the heap. Now, I'm not saying—"

"Blaming my carelessness," she repeated, affronted.

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He knelt quickly beside the bed. "Darling, let's not hide things any more. Last week there was the carpet sweeper on the cellar stairs. And that ladder! You were going to climb it to knock down that wasps' nest!—What I'm getting at, darling, is that you *want* something to happen to you, whether you realize it or not. You've got to be more careful, Olivia.—Oh, darling, please don't cry. I'm trying to help you. I'm not criticizing."

"I know, Loren. You're good. But my life—it doesn't seem worth living any more, I suppose. I don't mean I'm *trying* to end my life, but—"

"You're still thinking—of Stephen?" Loren hated the name and hated saying it.

She took her hands down from her pinkened eyes. "You made me promise you not to think of him, so I haven't. I swear it, Loren."

"Good, darling. That's my little girl." He took her hands in his. "What do you say to a cruise soon? Maybe in February? Myers is coming back from the coast and he can take over for me for a couple of weeks. What about Haiti or Bermuda?"

She seemed to think about it for a moment, but at last shook her head and said she knew he was only doing it for her, not because he really wanted to go. Loren remonstrated briefly, then gave it up. If Olivia didn't take to an idea at once, she never took to it. There had been one triumph—his convincing her that it made sense not to see Stephen Castle for a period of three months.

Olivia had met Stephen Castle at a party given by one of Loren's colleagues on the Stock Exchange. Stephen was 35, which was ten years younger than Loren and one year older than Olivia, and Stephen was an actor. Loren had no idea how Toohey, their host that evening, had met him, or why he had invited him to a party at which every other man was either in banking or on the Exchange; but there he'd been, like an evil alien spirit, and he'd concentrated on Olivia the entire evening, and she'd responded with her charming smiles that had captured Loren in a single evening eight years ago.

Afterward, when they were driving back to Old Greenwich, Olivia had said, "It's such fun to talk to somebody who's not in the stock market for a change! He told me he's rehearsing in a play now, 'The Frequent Guest.' We've got to see it, Loren."

They saw it. Stephen Castle was on for perhaps five minutes in

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Act One. They visited Stephen backstage, and Olivia invited him to a cocktail party they were giving the following weekend. He came, and spent that night in their guest room. In the next weeks Olivia drove her car into New York at least twice a week on shopping expeditions, but she made no secret of the fact she saw Stephen for lunch on those days and sometimes for cocktails too. At last she told Loren she was in love with Stephen and wanted a divorce.

Loren was speechless at first, even inclined to grant her a divorce by way of being sportsmanlike; but 48 hours after her announcement he came to what he considered his senses. By that time he had measured himself against his rival—not merely physically (Loren did not come off so well there, being no taller than Olivia, with a receding hairline and a small paunch) but morally and financially as well. In the last two categories he had it all over Stephen Castle, and modestly he pointed this out to Olivia.

"I'd never marry a man for his money," she retorted.

"I didn't mean you married me for my money, dear. I just happened to have it. But what's Stephen Castle ever going to have? Nothing much, from what I can see of his acting. You're used to more than he can give you. And you've known him only six weeks. How can you be sure his love for you is going to last?"

That last thought made Olivia pause. She said she would see Stephen just once more—"to talk it over." She drove to New York one morning and did not return until midnight. It was a Sunday, when Stephen had no performance. Loren sat up waiting for her. In tears Olivia told him that she and Stephen had come to an understanding. They would not see each other for a month, and if at the end of that time they did not feel the same way about each other, they would agree to forget the whole thing.

"But of course you'll feel the same," Loren said. "What's a month in the life of an adult? If you'd try it for three months—"

She looked at him through tears. "Three months?"

"Against the eight years we've been married? Is that unfair? Our marriage deserves at least a three-month chance, too, doesn't it?"

"All right, it's a bargain. Three months. I'll call Stephen tomorrow and tell him. We won't see each other or telephone for three months."

From that day Olivia had gone into a decline. She lost interest in gardening, in her bridge club, even in clothes. Her appetite fell

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off, though she did not lose much weight, perhaps because she was proportionately inactive. They had never had a servant. Olivia took pride in the fact that she had been a working girl, a saleswoman in the gift department of a large store in Manhattan, when Loren met her. She liked to say that she knew how to do things for herself. The big house in Old Greenwich was enough to keep any woman busy, though Loren had bought every conceivable labor-saving device. They also had a walk-in deep freeze, the size of a large closet, in the basement, so that their marketing was done less often than usual, and all food was delivered, anyway. Now that Olivia seemed low in energy, Loren suggested getting a maid, but Olivia refused.

Seven weeks went by, and Olivia kept her word about not seeing Stephen. But she was obviously so depressed, so ready to burst into tears, that Loren lived constantly on the brink of weakening and telling her that if she loved Stephen that much, she had a right to see him. Perhaps, Loren thought, Stephen Castle was feeling the same way, also counting off the weeks until he could see Olivia again. If so, Loren had already lost.

But it was hard for Loren to give Stephen credit for feeling anything. He was a lanky, rather stupid chap with oat-colored hair, and Loren had never seen him without a sickly smile on his mouth—as if he were a human billboard of himself, perpetually displaying what he must have thought was his most flattering expression.

Loren, a bachelor until at 37 he married Olivia, often sighed in dismay at the ways of women. For instance, Olivia: if he had felt so strongly about another woman, he would have set about promptly to extricate himself from his marriage. But here was Olivia hanging on, in a way. What did she expect to gain from it, he wondered. Did she think, or hope, that her infatuation for Stephen might disappear? Or did she want to spite Loren and prove that it wouldn't? Or did she know unconsciously that her love for Stephen Castle was all fantasy, and that her present depression represented to her and to Loren a fitting period of mourning for a love she didn't have the courage to go out and take?

But the Saturday of the garage incident made Loren doubt that Olivia was indulging in fantasy. He did not want to admit that Olivia was attempting to take her own life, but logic compelled him to. He had read about such people. They were different from

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the accident-prone, who might live to die a natural death, whatever that was. The others were the suicide-prone, and into this category he was sure Olivia fell.

A perfect example was the ladder episode. Olivia had been on the fourth or fifth rung when Loren noticed the crack in the left side of the ladder, and she had been quite unconcerned, even when he pointed it out to her. If it hadn't been for her saying she suddenly felt a little dizzy looking up at the wasps' nest, he never would have started to do the chore himself, and therefore wouldn't have seen the crack.

Loren noticed in the newspaper that Stephen's play was closing, and it seemed to him that Olivia's gloom deepened. Now there were dark circles under her eyes. She claimed she could not fall asleep before dawn.

"Call him if you want to, darling," Loren finally said. "See him once again and find out if you both—"

"No, I made a promise to you. Three months, Loren. I'll keep my promise," she said with a trembling lip.

Loren turned away from her, wretched and hating himself.

Olivia grew physically weaker. Once she stumbled coming down the stairs and barely caught herself on the banister. Loren suggested, not for the first time, that she see a doctor, but she refused to.

"The three months are nearly up, dear. I'll survive them," she said, smiling sadly.

It was true. Only two more weeks remained until March 15th, the three months' deadline. The Ides of March, Loren realized for the first time. A most ominous coincidence.

On Sunday afternoon Loren was looking over some office reports in his study when he heard a long scream, followed by a clattering crash. In an instant he was on his feet and running. It had come from the cellar, he thought, and if so, he knew what had happened. That damned carpet sweeper again!

"Olivia?"

From the dark cellar he heard a groan. Loren plunged down the steps. There was a little whirr of wheels, his feet flew up in front of him, and in the few seconds before his head smashed against the cement floor he understood everything: Olivia had not fallen down the cellar steps, she had only lured him here; all this time she had been trying to kill *him*, Loren Amory—and all for Stephen Castle.

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"I was upstairs in bed reading," Olivia told the police, her hands shaking as she clutched her dressing gown around her. "I heard a terrible crash and then—I came down—" She gestured helplessly toward Loren's dead body.

The police took down what she told them and commiserated with her. People ought to be more careful, they said, about things like carpet sweepers on dark stairways. There were fatalities like this every day in the United States. Then the body was taken away, and on Tuesday Loren Amory was buried.

Olivia rang Stephen on Wednesday. She had been telephoning him every day except Saturdays and Sundays, but she had not rung him since the previous Friday. They had agreed that any weekday she did not call him at his apartment at 11:00 A.M. would be a signal that their mission had been accomplished. Also, Loren Amory had got quite a lot of space on the obituary page Monday. He had left nearly a million dollars to his widow, and houses in Florida, Connecticut, and Maine.

"Dearest! You look so tired!" were Stephen's first words to her when they met in an out-of-the-way bar in New York on Wednesday.

"Nonsense! It's all makeup," Olivia said gaily. "And you an actor!" She laughed. "I have to look properly gloomy for my neighbors, you know. And I'm never sure when I'll run into someone I know in New York."

Stephen looked around him nervously, then said with his habitual smile, "Darling Olivia, how soon can we be together?"

"Very soon," she said promptly. "Not up at the house, of course, but remember we talked about a cruise? Maybe Trinidad? I've got the money with me. I want you to buy the tickets."

They took separate staterooms, and the local Connecticut paper, without a hint of suspicion, reported that Mrs. Amory's voyage was for reasons of health.

Back in the United States in April, suntanned and looking much improved, Olivia confessed to her friends that she had met someone she was "interested in." Her friends assured her that was normal, and that she shouldn't be alone for the rest of her life. The curious thing was that when Olivia invited Stephen to a dinner party at her house, none of her friends remembered him, though several had met him at that cocktail party a few months before. Stephen was much more sure of himself now, and he behaved like an angel, Olivia thought.

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In August they were married. Stephen had been getting nibbles in the way of work, but nothing materialized. Olivia told him not to worry, that things would surely pick up after the summer. Stephen did not seem to worry very much, though he protested he ought to work, and said if necessary he would try for some television parts. He developed an interest in gardening, planted some young blue spruces, and generally made the place look alive again.

Olivia was delighted that Stephen liked the house, because she did. Neither of them ever referred to the cellar stairs, but they had a light switch put at the top landing, so that a similar thing could not occur again. Also, the carpet sweeper was kept in its proper place, in the broom closet in the kitchen.

They entertained more often than Olivia and Loren had done. Stephen had many friends in New York, and Olivia found them amusing. But Stephen, Olivia thought, was drinking just a little too much. At one party, when they were all out on the terrace, Stephen nearly fell over the parapet. Two of the guests had to grab him.

"Better watch out for yourself in this house, Steve," said Parker Barnes, an actor friend of Stephen's. "It just might be jinxed."

"What d'ya mean?" Stephen asked. "I don't believe that for a minute. I may be an actor, but I haven't got a single superstition."

"Oh, so you're an actor, Mr. Castle!" a woman's voice said out of the darkness.

After the guests had gone, Stephen asked Olivia to come out again on the terrace.

"Maybe the air'll clear my head," Stephen said, smiling. "Sorry I was tipsy tonight. —There's old Orion. See him?" He put his arm around Olivia and drew her close. "Brightest constellation in the heavens."

"You're hurting me, Stephen! Not so—" Then she screamed and squirmed, fighting for her life.

"Damn you!" Stephen gasped, astounded at her strength.

She had twisted away from him and was standing near the bedroom door, facing him now. "You were going to push me over."

"No! Good God, Olivia! —I lost my balance, that's all. I thought I was going over myself!"

"That's a fine thing to do, then, hold onto a woman and pull her over too."

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"I didn't realize. I'm drunk, darling. And I'm sorry."

They lay as usual in the same bed that night, but both of them were only pretending sleep. Until, for Olivia at least, just as she had used to tell Loren, sleep came around dawn.

The next day, casually and surreptitiously, each of them looked over the house from attic to cellar—Olivia with a view to protecting herself from possible death traps, Stephen with a view to setting them. He had already decided that the cellar steps offered the best possibility, in spite of the duplication, because he thought no one would believe anyone would dare to use the same means—if the intention was murder.

Olivia happened to be thinking the same thing.

The cellar steps had never before been so free of impediments or so well lighted. Neither of them took the initiative to turn the light out at night. Outwardly each professed love and faith in the other.

"I'm sorry I ever said such a thing to you, Stephen," she whispered in his ear as she embraced him. "I was afraid on the terrace that night, that's all. When you said, 'Damn you'—"

"I know, angel. You *couldn't* have thought I meant to hurt you. I said 'Damn you' just because you were there, and I thought I might be pulling you over."

They talked about another cruise. They wanted to go to Europe next spring. But at meals they cautiously tasted every item of food before beginning to eat.

How could *I* have done anything to the food, Stephen thought to himself, since you never leave the kitchen while you're cooking it.

And Olivia: I don't put anything past you. There's only one direction you seem to be bright in, Stephen.

Her humiliation in having lost a lover was hidden by a dark resentment. She realized she had been victimized. The last bit of Stephen's charm had vanished. Yet now, Olivia thought, he was doing the best job of acting in his life—and a twenty-four-hour-a-day acting job at that. She congratulated herself that it did not fool her, and she weighed one plan against another, knowing that this "accident" had to be even more convincing than the one that had freed her from Loren.

Stephen realized he was not in quite so awkward a position. Everyone who knew him and Olivia, even slightly, thought he adored her. An accident would be assumed to be just that, an accident, if he said so. He was now toying with the idea of the

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closet-sized deep freeze in the cellar. There was no inside handle on the door, and once in a while Olivia went into the farthest corner of the deep freeze to get steaks or frozen asparagus. But would she dare to go into it, now that her suspicions were aroused, if he happened to be in the cellar at the same time? He doubted it.

While Olivia was breakfasting in bed one morning—she had taken to her own bedroom again, and Stephen brought her breakfast as Loren had always done—Stephen experimented with the door of the deep freeze. If it so much as touched a solid object in swinging open, be discovered, it would slowly but surely swing shut on its rebound. There was no solid object near the door now, and on the contrary the door was intended to be swung fully open, so that a catch on the outside of the door would lock in a grip set in the wall for just that purpose, and thus keep the door open. Olivia, he had noticed, always swung the door wide when she went in, and it latched onto the wall automatically. But if he put something in its way, even the corner of the box of kindling wood, the door would strike it and swing shut again, before Olivia had time to realize what had happened.

However, that particular moment did not seem the right one to put the kindling box in position, so Stephen did not set his trap. Olivia had said something about their going out to a restaurant tonight. She would not be taking anything out to thaw today.

They took a little walk at three in the afternoon—through the woods behind the house, then back home again—and they almost started holding hands, in a mutually distasteful and insulting pretense of affection; but their fingers only brushed and separated.

"A cup of tea would taste good, wouldn't it, darling?" said Olivia.

"Um-m." He smiled. Poison in the tea? Poison in the cookies? She'd made them herself that morning.

He remembered how they had plotted Loren's sad demise—her tender whispers of murder over their luncheons, her infinite patience as the weeks went by and plan after plan failed. It was he who had suggested the carpet sweeper on the cellar steps and the lure of a scream from her. What could *her* bird-brain ever plan?

Shortly after their tea—everything had tasted fine—Stephen strolled out of the living room as if with no special purpose. He felt compelled to try out the kindling box again to see if it could

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really be depended on. He felt inspired, too, to set the trap now and leave it. The light at the head of the cellar stairs was on. He went carefully down the steps.

He listened for a moment to see if Olivia was possibly following him. Then he pulled the kindling box into position, not parallel to the front of the deep freeze, of course, but a little to one side, as if someone had dragged it out of the shadow to see into it better and left it there. He opened the deep-freeze door with exactly the speed and force Olivia might use, flinging the door from him as he stepped in with one foot, his right hand outstretched to catch the door on the rebound. But the foot that bore his weight slid several inches forward just as the door bumped against the kindling box.

Stephen was down on his right knee, his left leg straight out in front of him, and behind him the door shut. He got to his feet instantly and faced the closed door wide-eyed. It was dark, and he groped for the auxiliary switch to the left of the door, which put a light on at the back of the deep freeze.

How had it happened? The damned glaze of frost on the floor! But it wasn't only the frost, he saw. What he had slipped on was a little piece of suet that he now saw in the middle of the floor, at the end of the greasy streak his slide had made.

Stephen stared at the suet neutrally, blankly, for an instant, then faced the door again, pushed it, felt along its firm rubber-sealed crack. He could call Olivia, of course. Eventually she'd hear him, or at least *miss* him, before he had time to freeze. She'd come down to the cellar, and she'd be able to hear him there even if she couldn't hear him in the living room. Then she'd open the door, of course.

He smiled weakly, and tried to convince himself she *would* open the door.

"Olivia?—*Olivia!* I'm down in the *cellar!*"

It was nearly a half hour later when Olivia called to Stephen to ask him which restaurant he preferred, a matter that would influence what she wore. She looked for him in his bedroom, in the library, on the terrace, and finally called out the front door, thinking he might be somewhere on the lawn.

At last she tried the cellar.

By this time, hunched in his tweed jacket, his arms crossed, Stephen was walking up and down in the deep freeze, giving out

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distress signals at intervals of thirty seconds and using the rest of his breath to blow into his shirt in an effort to warm himself. Olivia was just about to leave the cellar when she heard her name called faintly.

"Stephen? —Stephen, where are you?"

"In the deep freeze!" he called as loudly as he could.

Olivia looked at the deep freeze with an incredulous smile.

"Open it, can't you? I'm in the *deep freeze!*" came his muffled voice.

Olivia threw her head back and laughed, not even caring if Stephen heard her. Then still laughing so hard that she had to bend over, she climbed the cellar stairs.

What amused her was that she had thought of the deep freeze as a fine place to dispose of Stephen, but she hadn't worked out how to get him into it. His being there now, she realized, was owning to some funny accident—maybe he'd been trying to set a trap for her. It was all too comical. And lucky!

Or, maybe, she thought cagily, his intention even now was to trick her into opening the deep-freeze door, then to yank her inside and close the door on her. She was certainly not going to let *that* happen!

Olivia took her car and drove nearly twenty miles northward, had a sandwich at a roadside café, then went to a movie. When she got home at midnight she found she had not the courage to call "Stephen" to the deep freeze, or even to go down to the cellar. She wasn't sure he'd be dead by now, and even if he were silent it might mean he was only pretending to be dead or unconscious.

But tomorrow, she thought, there wouldn't be any doubt he'd be dead. The very lack of air, for one thing, ought to finish him by that time.

She went to bed and assured herself a night's sleep with a light sedative. She would have a strenuous day tomorrow. Her story of the mild quarrel with Stephen—over which restaurant they'd go to, nothing more—and his storming out of the living room to take a walk, she thought, would have to be very convincing.

At ten the next morning, after orange juice and coffee, Olivia felt ready for her role of the horrified, grief-stricken widow. After all, she told herself, she had practised the role—it would be the second time she had played the part. She decided to face the police in her dressing gown, as before.

To be quite natural about the whole thing she went down to the

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cellar to make the "discovery" before she called the police.

"Stephen? Stephen?" she called out with confidence.

No answer.

She opened the deep freeze with apprehension, gasped at the curled-up, frost-covered figure on the floor, then walked the few feet toward him—aware that her footprints on the floor would be visible to corroborate her story that she had come in to try to revive Stephen.

Ka-*bloom* went the door—as if someone standing outside had given it a good hard push.

Now Olivia gasped in earnest, and her mouth stayed open. She'd flung the door wide. It should have latched onto the outside wall. "Hello! Is anybody out there? Open this door, please! At once!"

But she knew there was no one out there. It was just some damnable accident. Maybe an accident that Stephen had arranged.

She looked at his face. His eyes were open, and on his white lips was his familiar little smile, triumphant now, and utterly nasty. Olivia did not look at him again. She drew her flimsy dressing gown as closely about her as she could and began to yell.

"Help! Someone!—*police!*"

She kept it up for what seemed like hours, until she grew hoarse and until she did not really feel very cold any more, only a little sleepy.

"Q"

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Ron Goulart

The Laughing Chef

One of the most difficult 'tec types to write—the humorous crime story—what a famous mystery critic used to call "crime without tears." And this time it happened in full view of millions of people . . .

You don't often see something like that on television. In fact, most people thought it was a stunt and didn't pay close attention. That's why there was some confusion in the news media about exactly what his last words were. But I know what he said.

Back in May I'd been over at the KBKJ-TV studios supervising the taping of three commercials for my ad agency's local auto-dealer account. For some reason the chrome trim on the left side of the demonstration car kept falling off every time the announcer patted the front fender affectionately. After thirteen takes we took a break and I went over to the coffee machine.

Donny Sundell was there, biting nicks in the rim of his paper coffee cup and making angry noises. Donny was just 35, a short stocky man, moderately rumpled. He wrote continuity for two of KBKJ's live shows. "Argh," he said by way of greeting.

"Which show is it this time? The Waltz Hour or The Laughing Chef?" I asked him as I stuck a coin in the machine.

Nothing happened. Donny made a groaning noise and whacked the brown mechanism with his free fist and it commenced working again. He said, "You've known me for six years. Do I have a sense of humor?"

"No."

Donny nodded and bit at his cup again. "I guess not. Well, if I did I couldn't write this stuff, could I?"

"What happened now?"

"He told me he cooked the pig."

"Who told you? And what pig?"

"Well, who would tell me something so stupid? Bob Lorenzo, of course. The Laughing Chef himself," said Donny, rumpling him-

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self further. "Don't you ever watch The Waltz Hour?"

"Not unless we have a commercial spot on it. Oh, you mean the pig they use on that show."

"That pig, yes. The pig that Ole holds when he does the comedy routine with Dick," said Donny. He bit too much out of the cup and coffee began to trickle down his hand and onto the sleeve of his cardigan. "Lorenzo told me he'd cooked it and stuck an apple in its mouth and could I write a new opening for this afternoon's show. A closeup of the pig and then pull back to show today's audience panel seated around the table smacking their lips."

"You believed him?"

"I phoned eight pet shops trying to get a new pig."

"Even if he did cook it, that's Ole's problem."

"Ole doesn't care. If the pig's missing he'll go out holding a cocker spaniel. He told me so. How can he make pig jokes with a cocker spaniel?"

"Ole was kidding you too, probably."

Donny threw his leaking coffee cup away and wiped himself off with paper napkins. "I suppose so. Well, how are you and your wife? Her foot feeling better?"

"What foot?"

"I don't know. Which one did she break skiing?"

"Neither. She doesn't ski. Tennis is her sport."

Donny smacked the coffee machine. He grabbed his fresh cup out with such force that it sloshed coffee across the front of him. "Gee, did I fall for another one?"

"Lorenzo again?"

"When we saw you go by this morning he told me about her foot," said Donny. "I gave him a dollar to go buy your wife a funny get-well card."

"She'll appreciate the thought," I said. "You and Marjorie ought to come over for dinner sometime. You haven't even been to our new place in the Valley."

"Oh, Marjorie," he said. "I don't know. Marjorie and I aren't getting along so well these days. Listen, you know Marjorie. Do you think she could be—"

"Be what?"

"You know, having an affair. Seeing someone else."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know. I asked her and she said she was, but you know how everybody likes to kid me." He sighed and drank his coffee.

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The assistant floorman on our commercials came to tell me they'd found a glue which would make the chrome stay on so long as the announcer didn't pat the car too hard and I said goodbye to Donny and went back to work.

I had to fly to San Francisco the next week to scout locations for a beer commercial that our advertising agency was going to shoot. The story board called for a Swedish model to come floating in to shore on a beer barrel and there was too much oil in the ocean around Los Angeles. While I was away Donny got even more unsettled by the Laughing Chef.

He told me later what happened. Before one show Lorenzo said that one of the ladies picked for that day's panel was his ex-wife. Lorenzo didn't mind having her on the show but he thought it would be dangerous to go ahead with the recipe of the day, since it had been their favorite dish when they were married.

Donny didn't think to ask how nesselrode pie came to be the favorite romantic dish of a young married couple. He ran into his tiny KBKJ office and rewrote the first half of the show in eighteen minutes. When he got back into the control booth he noticed the panel was made up of two middle-aged men, a 70-year-old grandmother, and a teen-age bride.

Then Lorenzo began hinting that he was the man Donny's wife was seeing. He'd hand Donny folded notes and say, "Here's that bouillabaisse recipe Marj asked me for." When Donny's curiosity prompted him to unfold the sheet of paper he found it read: "Every moment away from you is an agonizing eternity. I fling a thousand burning kisses at your petite little feet."

Having no sense of humor, Donny thought the Laughing Chef might actually express himself that way. When he took off from work early, drove home doing 80 on the freeway, and flung the love note at his wife, she said, "I wish you wouldn't open my mail, Don." She liked to kid him, too.

I saw all three of them about a month later. I'd been in New York talking to a client of ours who wanted to film his next two support-hose commercials in front of the fountain he'd recently donated to his hometown of Yonkers. I was tired when I got back home to Los Angeles and didn't much feel like attending this particular party. But the host was an actor we were trying to talk into doing a testimonial for a dental-plate cleanser. So far he

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liked the fee we'd offered but he didn't know if he was quite ready to admit that he wore false teeth.

Lorenzo was in the big kitchen, helping with a fondue. He was a tall man in his late thirties, very lean and bony and with short-cropped sandy hair. He had the kind of mustache that British actors used to wear in India-army movies. Marjorie Sundell, a frail but pretty blonde, was with him. I located Donny outside, next to the pool, nibbling at the rim of his cocktail glass.

"You shouldn't eat those," I told him.

"Things are terrible," he said. "How's your wife?"

"Fine. Home with the kids. Bobo's got a touch of the flu."

"Which one is Bobo, the girl?"

"We have two boys."

Donny rubbed his low forehead. "Listen, I know what they're up to. Maybe I don't have much of a sense of humor, but this I've figured out." The glass almost cracked under his nibbling.

"You mean Marjorie and Lorenzo?"

"Yes. I know what they're up to. Do you read much?"

"Only nonfiction. I never seem to—what's that got to do with anything?"

"Poe," said Donny. "Edgar Allan Poe. The old 'purloined letter' gimmick. Put something right out in the open and nobody will see it."

"Police procedures have changed a lot since Poe's day," I said. "I don't think that would work any more."

"Of course it doesn't work. Which is how come I'm onto it." He threw his glass into the pool angrily. "Listen, if you were having an affair with my wife, what would *you* do?"

"The same thing anybody does when they're having an affair."

"Exactly. You'd be sneaky. You'd go to out-of-the-way motels, sign false names, make phone calls only at certain hours, dine in the dark corners of shadowy restaurants. Wouldn't you?"

I said, "Look, Donny, you've got to stop paying so much attention to Lorenzo. His reputation calls for him to joke a lot. After all, he's the Laughing Chef. I hear his show is likely to go into syndication any time now. You've got to stop letting him bother you."

"So he comes right out in the open, don't you see? 'Ha, ha, I'm seeing your wife,' " said Donny. "If I get mad they pretend it's all a joke. It's a perfect coverup. Diabolical. Worthy of Poe."

"Try to ignore him. If the show does go into syndication you'll

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get a percentage. Maybe you won't have to turn out so much copy then. You can drop The Waltz Hour."

"I'd rather stick with Ole and his pig."

Lorenzo came hurrying over, excusing his way through the crowd of some 50 guests. His face was somber, his mustache turned down. "Better come quickly, Don," he said in his affable voice. "Marj's had a little accident."

Donny jumped to his feet. "What's wrong?"

"She cut her hand helping me slice French bread."

"Damn," said Donny.

I caught his arm while saying to Lorenzo, "Why don't you stop for a while. Quit pulling this stuff on him."

"Doesn't he know when I'm kidding and when I'm not? She really is cut," insisted Lorenzo. "She'll have to go to a doctor. There's one half a mile down the hill."

Donny tugged free and went running back inside the house.

It turned out that Marjorie really had been injured and needed five stitches. It also turned out she was having an affair with Lorenzo, and Donny was right about some of the joking being a coverup. I don't know if Donny ever learned for sure that Marjorie was meeting the Laughing Chef. My wife heard about it from a girl she used to model with who happened to see Donny's wife and Lorenzo in the dark corner of a shadowy restaurant in Santa Monica.

I never saw Donny again after that party—that is, not in person. So I don't know much of what went on in the weeks that followed. I'm sure the Laughing Chef kept trying to play new jokes and Donny grew more and more upset.

I had to spend almost three weeks in the East. Mostly in Cape Cod trying to sober up a major novelist who was going to write us a series of prose poems to be used in magazine ads for our beer account. Right after I returned to Los Angeles I came down with the flu. After a day in bed I didn't feel like reading any more, not even nonfiction. So I decided to watch daytime television. Which is how I happened to see the whole thing happen, live.

Some of the background I didn't learn about until later, from the director of The Laughing Chef show and one of the cameramen. Apparently what happened was that a few minutes before that afternoon's show one of the two men on the audience panel had a mild heart attack. They got him off the stage barely six

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minutes before the show was scheduled to go on. There wasn't time to pick someone new, brief him, and get him to sign the various releases and disclaimers.

So Donny tore off the cardigan he worked in and hustled into the floorman's sports coat, which was almost his size. They did a quick makeup job and when Lorenzo came strolling into the kitchen set, giving his characteristic opening laugh, Donny was sitting at the kitchen table with the rest of the panel of taste testers and kitchen helpers.

I propped another pillow behind myself and leaned forward when I recognized Donny. He was next to a retired insurance salesman from Altadena and a 70-year-old grandmother with a birthday orchid in her hair. A plump blonde visiting housewife from Michigan rounded out the group.

"Ah, ha," said the Laughing Chef. "We have a particularly hungry-looking panel today, don't we, ladies? All looking like first-class gourmets to me. Indeed, the young fellow there in the rumpled sports coat might even be a gourmand, ha, ha!

"Now, first things first, ladies. The young lady there in the lovely flowered print dress. You can help us get under way. We're making stuffed flank steak today, ladies. Ah, yes, I hear you murmuring in anticipation. Delicious, isn't it? And not really difficult to prepare when you know what you're about."

Lorenzo then interviewed the Michigan housewife and gave her a knife from the rack over his stove. He put her to chopping parsley for the stuffing.

Next he gave the other panelists kitchen chores, saving Donny for last. On the kitchen stove a pot of something was simmering. "Now, ladies, you know some things are not laughing matters with me. If you want to run a first-class kitchen, you must observe certain rules. One of which is, you must have a superb stock at all times. Stock, remember—don't you dare call it soup! We've had this simmering, ever so gently, since a few moments before we joined you today, ladies. I'm going to invite this personable young gentleman in the loose jacket to sample our stock and then lend me a hand in our next step."

Donny hesitated, but he got up and joined Lorenzo at the stove. The camera came in for a tight two-shot. After a few general questions the Laughing Chef selected a ladle and dipped it into the steaming stock pot.

"We'll allow this a little minute to cool, ladies, before we get

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this gentleman's honest opinion of its taste."

Lorenzo laughed while he held the spoonful of stock and waited for it to cool. "Ready now and a real delight, I'll wager." He thrust the spoon into Donny's mouth.

After Donny had swallowed, the Laughing Chef turned his back to the camera for a few seconds and whispered something in Donny's ear. Two days later I found out that he had murmured, "Now your wife is mine. I just fed you a fatal dose of an untraceable slow-acting poison."

Lorenzo moved around and faced the camera, grinning, "Well, how did that taste, Mr. Sundell?"

Donny stared at him for a full five seconds. Then he made an angry noise. He ran over and grabbed the knife away from the young housewife. He groaned once, jumped at Lorenzo, and stabbed the knife into Lorenzo's chest.

The Laughing Chef rotated half around, murmured something, and fell dead. Not everyone caught what Lorenzo said, but I did. He said, "My God, don't you ever know when I'm kidding?"

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Georges Simenon

Inspector Maigret and the Missing Miniatures

You couldn't expect Maigret to be happy about it. Here was this wealthy lawyer of Chateauneuf-sur-Loire, a Monsieur Motte, interrupting Maigret's vacation and mesmerizing the famous detective into giving up his well-earned rest and his puttering in the garden in order to investigate the thefts of valuable ivory miniatures. The lawyer, so calm, so polite, so deliberate, obviously took his personal responsibilities with extreme seriousness: he had no right, he said, to destroy the happiness of one of his three daughters by forbidding her to marry; on the other hand, he had no right to let that daughter marry a thief—if it was the fiancé who had stolen the ivory curios. But surely these weren't Maigret's responsibilities. Didn't he have some rights?—to a little peace and quiet with Madame Maigret?

But Maigret was to learn (as you, the reader, will) that in a curious way the simple thefts of ivory carvings could become more moving than all the gory crimes with which the Police Judiciaire were so often concerned . . .

One of Georges Simenon's strangest long novelets—full of atmosphere and enigma and characters who will haunt you . . .

Detective: INSPECTOR MAIGRET

Nobody could have looked more remote from adventure or from the slightest possibility of the unforeseen than Inspector Maigret in the garden of his country home this July morning. The garden was surrounded by a low wall and beyond that flowed the Loire.

Everything seemed to be giving off a transparent heat haze which rose like steam in the sun—the rough, white-washed walls

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covered with espaliers, the flowerbeds watered the previous evening, the rows of pale lettuces, the bell-shaped glass cloches covering the melon plants. Even the drowsy flies seemed to have difficulty moving in the heavily laden air.

With his pipe between his teeth and an old straw hat on his head, Maigret in holiday mood was blissfully threading his way through a bed of tomatoes, so ripe that they dropped in a bright red pulp on the ground.

Suddenly he raised his head, surprised at first to hear a car making its way down the lane which led nowhere in particular. He became even more astonished when he heard this car stop outside his door.

He turned toward the kitchen where he could make out Madame Maigret in the blue shadows. He saw that she was as surprised as he by this event and was standing still with a saucepan in her hand.

The copper doorknocker was already banging on the door. With familiar movements Madame Maigret untied the strings of her cotton apron and did up her bun of hair.

Maigret did not want to look as if he were going to meet the visitor. He stayed where he was in his garden, listening to the doors opening and closing.

He heard steps, first on the gray flagstones of the passage, then in the dining room, and finally, his wife's voice.

"You'll find him in the garden."

There was only a rectangular patch of shade close to the house and in this rectangle stood an iron table and a green-painted bench. On the wall hung a towel beside an enamel wash basin for washing one's hands after gardening.

Maigret came slowly forward, and screwing up his eyes against the sun, made out a man of fifty or sixty, dressed in black, with an air of extreme and almost excessive correctness about him which reminded Maigret of certain important magistrates.

"I'm sorry to disturb you while you're on holiday," began the stranger, putting his bowler hat on the table and mopping his forehead, which was crowned with thick white hair. "I am Motte, a notary of the Chateauneuf."

And with a little smile which seemed automatic and which Maigret was often to see on him later, he added, "Oh, you certainly haven't heard of me. I, on the other hand, have heard a lot about *you*."

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"Sit down, won't you?"

"Thank you. I've come—ahem—I might as well say it at once and get rid of an irksome duty, mightn't I? It's not a very pleasant request to make of a man whom one finds, like the philosopher, smoking his pipe in his garden.

"Yet I'm here to ask you to be so good as to leave the garden and the house for a few days and during that time to come and stay with me."

Twice now he had shown his strange smile which was really only an automatic lifting of his lip. Perhaps in this way he was trying to make up for his chilly, solemn manner.

Madame Maigret had gone indoors again without making a sound and had probably gone upstairs to put on a clean dress. Her husband guessed she had because the bedroom window was wide open and he could hear her opening the wardrobe.

"I know that when you began your holidays you didn't expect to set up as a private detective. But I've come to ask for your help as an exceptional favor. I'll explain the situation to you as simply as possible and you can decide."

He closed his eyes a moment as if to put his ideas in order and Maigret sensed that here was a man used to explaining himself clearly, who even derived a certain satisfaction from listening to himself speaking.

"As I've told you, I am a notary at Chateauneuf-sur-Loire, about forty kilometers from here. I've never been ambitious and the look of this house and garden leads me to believe that we have something in common, if only in the simplicity of our tastes.

"In fact, I'm only happy in my own home, in the house which belonged to my parents and grandparents.

"My joy in life comes from my three daughters: Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde.

"Emilienne is now sixteen, Armande nineteen, and Clotilde twenty-three. Only one of them, Armande, is engaged and the marriage was to have taken place next month."

Maigret noted in passing the "was to have" and, although he continued to show polite attention, this did not prevent him from watching an army of ants on the move, like a narrow river flowing over the gravel.

"I don't know whether you have any children?"

Maigret shook his head and thought that if his wife had heard from the bedroom window, she would be unhappy for the rest of

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the day because of it, for this was her great sorrow.

"I have always given my daughters the greatest freedom. Indeed, what I want is to be able to trust them. And although country notaries are usually taken to be people full of prejudices, there is one question on which I have none. I mean money. In fact—"

The phrase was one of his favorite expressions, which continually reappeared in the conversation like the little mechanical smiles on his face.

"In fact, the question of preventing my daughters from marrying men without means does not arise for me. I've always said so. When the situation occurred—when Armande first met Gerard Donavent—I didn't bother to point out to her that the boy was not only penniless but also jobless. In fact—"

"Again!" thought Maigret.

"He's a painter and he's twenty-three. For the past year he's been renting a little house on the banks of the Loire. He is getting an exhibition ready for next winter and is counting on it to make a name for himself.

"Armande loves him. She refuses to wait for this exhibition before she marries him. I think she's using all her charms to see that the marriage takes place beforehand and she even attaches a sort of superstitious importance to it."

He stopped on seeing Maigret leaning forward slightly, like a man who is falling asleep.

"Am I boring you?"

"Not at all. I was watching that ant carrying a load ten times larger than itself. It doesn't prevent me from listening. You had got as far as 'a sort of superstitious importance to it.'"

All the same, Maigret was cursing this black-clothed bumbler who thought fit to violate the privacy of Maigret's garden by coming and relating his little family tales with touching detail.

Emilienne? Armande? Clotilde? So Armande and Gerard were going to get married? Good luck to them! And may Gerard's exhibition be a success! Just now Maigret was happy among his tomatoes.

"May I offer you a glass of white wine?"

"I'll have a glass of water, if you don't mind."

That was up to him but he, Maigret, was still going to have his wine.

"Now I shall soon be finished, don't worry. I hope I've given you the impression of a happy household, a united family filled with

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the joy of living. Add a final touch to the picture, a little touch of the ridiculous, and it will be complete. I am a collector."

Thereupon the notary gave a kind of faint smile, almost apologetic.

"A collector of ivory curios and statues. I have about eighteen hundred of them in my possession, some of which are extremely rare. Now, for the past month I've been noticing that things have been stolen in the house two or three times a week.

"You're probably thinking it is very impudent of me to come disturbing you about thefts which you must consider unimportant. But, apart from the fact that certain of the missing objects are worth several thousands and even tens of thousands of francs, the serious thing about this, Monsieur Maigret, is the moral effect of this stealing.

"I've thought of everything, believe me. I'm not a man who panics nor one whom you would call imaginative.

"Like me, our old cook was born in the house. Her husband, the gardener, has been living with us for thirty-two years.

"As for the little maid, I've been watching her and I'm convinced she is incapable of stealing objects which, after all, she wouldn't know what to do with.

"I also thought of my head clerk, whom you will be seeing very shortly."

Maigret gave a start but did not protest.

"I have a second clerk whom you will also see, and you will understand that my suspicion could not rest on him.

"As you can guess, there only remains Gerard Donavent and that is why I am here.

"I have no right to destroy the happiness of my daughter and this young man because of things which I may have imagined. Neither have I the right to let Armande marry a thief.

"So I hope you'll see that it's impossible for me to bring the police officially into this business."

"Where are these important ivory figures?" Maigret asked suddenly.

This time Monsieur Motte's smile was more definite, for he guessed that, from that moment on, his task would be easier.

"In my office, I mean, in my private office on the first floor. When we get there I will tell you what precautions I have taken and what traps I have laid."

"Which were of no use?"

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"Which have not prevented the thefts from taking place at shorter and shorter intervals."

"Are these things easy to sell?"

"Impossible, you might say. As soon as the first thefts had taken place, I notified all the dealers likely to buy such pieces and I wrote to several collectors whom I know in Paris and London.

"May I remind you that the marriage takes place in a month, in twenty-nine days to be precise, and that I am getting more and more worried as the date approaches."

"Have you spoken of these thefts to your family?"

"Only of the first, for at that time I thought someone had inadvertently moved the thing. Since then I have said nothing."

"These curios, do they take up much room?"

"They are of different sizes, but I'm especially interested in the miniatures. Some Chinese curios are no bigger than a nut and yet they contain several finely carved figures."

"One more question: does your thief choose the most expensive pieces?"

"Yes."

"Are they easily recognizable?"

"On the contrary, it is very difficult to determine whether such and such an ivory is of great value or whether, on the other hand, it is an ordinary piece. Now the only other thing I had to tell you—"

Maigret thought: "He's going to talk about money!"

Not at all. The notary from Chateauneuf pursued his line of thought without allowing himself to be diverted from it.

"—is to tell you how, in my opinion, you ought to set about it. It's obviously necessary that you should live in the house for a while. And also that you should arouse no suspicions. So, because of this, I cannot introduce you as the famous Inspector Maigret."

It rarely happened that the Inspector ever made fun of people, but this time he could not resist the impulse to joke. It was probably Monsieur Motte's complete self-possession which caused it. He ventured to remark in all seriousness: "Perhaps I could wear a false beard?"

But the notary did not allow himself to be sidetracked and pretended not to have heard.

"I shall introduce you at home, therefore, as an old Army friend, a friend who has come from a town a long distance away. What town do you know especially well?"

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"What about Bergerac?" suggested Maigret.

"All right. You are a friend from Bergerac. Monsieur—what name do you suggest?"

"Legros?"

The strange thing was that Maigret did not take the matter seriously at all. He replied solemnly, but inwardly he was laughing at the plan being outlined.

"Can you drive?"

"A car? No."

"That's a pity."

"Why? Must Monsieur Legros have a car?"

"Oh, it's absolutely necessary. You'll see why. I drive. All my daughters drive, even the youngest who is not yet entitled to a license. My first clerk often used the car, and so does Gerard."

"And I must be able to follow him," growled Maigret. His eyes were smarting by dint of keeping them fixed on a procession of ants which had attracted his attention.

"We'll settle that some other way. Since you can't drive you'll have to have a chauffer. My friend Legros can quite well have a chauffeur. By the way, what will Legros' profession be?"

"Whatever you say."

"A profession that you can talk about with some knowledge."

"Wholesale timber merchant? I've always dreamed of being a wholesale timber merchant, because of the freshly sawed planks."

"All right. So I will take you to Orleans. We'll hire a chauffer-driven car. You will arrive a quarter of an hour after me and—"

It was then that Maigret wondered whether he was dreaming.

In a daze he looked at this little man as if he were seeing him for the first time, this little man who had enlisted his aid in a few minutes with a kind of mesmeric calm.

Then he wondered whether his wife, who had come downstairs to the kitchen again, had been listening to the conversation.

Finally, in order to gain time, he emptied his glass and tapped the bowl of his pipe against his shoe.

"But—" he began.

He was at last beginning to realize that he had almost allowed a spell to be cast on him. Now it was too late, it seemed, to destroy the whole structure so skillfully built up by the solemn notary from Chateauneuf.

"I suppose," the notary was saying, "you will not take long to get ready? You will have to take a few changes of clothes."

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He looked Maigret in the eye and Maigret had to face him. This was the decisive moment. Maigret could quite easily have come out with: "For goodness' sake, don't talk nonsense!"

Instead he stood up to go and dress.

"The point is . . ."

"Just think—Armande is getting married in twenty-nine days' time!"

So what? Did he, Maigret, know this Armande who was in love with her Gerard? Was he, Maigret, the one who collected ivory miniatures?

Here he was at home, in his garden with his straw hat on, and the strip of shadow moving gradually forward over the ground, becoming narrower and narrower on the side nearest the wall until, at midday, there would be nothing left at all.

"I know a garage which will give us a good chauffeur."

Monsieur Motte suspected nothing! There he sat, on the bench, looking at the tips of his polished shoes, and about to say, "What are you waiting for?"

But Maigret was making his way to the kitchen.

At his first glance he saw that his wife had heard, for she began to shake her head vigorously from side to side.

"You're not going!" was what she was saying by her action.

And he, without knowing why—at least, without being able to define why—answered in the same way, but by nodding his head up and down.

"I am going!" was his reply.

Then aloud: "Come upstairs with me and get my suitcase ready."

On the stairs she scolded him. "And I've cooked you a veal stew."

But in the bedroom she had to keep quiet for Monsieur Motte could hear them through the open window.

Maigret leaned out to have a look at him. He did not know why, but he was impressed by this funny little man's self-assurance, by his deliberate way of talking and his extreme politeness.

"Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde," Maigret muttered.

"Is that the reason you're going?"

She was not really as jealous as she sometimes appeared to be. And the proof that it pleased Maigret was that he smiled and shrugged.

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But, then, when he looked at himself in the mirror, he pulled a face at the thought of becoming Monsieur Legros. Monsieur Legros from Bergerac. Monsieur Legros, wholesale timber merchant.

He was trying to imagine the dining room where he would soon be having lunch, surrounded by people whom he did not know and who would pick him to pieces out of curiosity.

Soon he was ready and went downstairs to find Monsieur Motte still in the same place.

"I suppose it won't be necessary for us to speak too familiarly to each other?" Maigret growled, as if to have his own back for having been so complacent.

"No. After such a long time . . ."

"Where did we do our military service?"

"I did mine at Orange, with the Spahis."

It was incredible, but there it was: this bleak little man had worn the dashing uniform of the Spahis and had careered round the streets of Orange on an Arab horse!

"The Spahis it is, then," said Maigret. "After all, there's nothing to prevent me from having been a Spahi too. As long as you don't expect me to get on a horse."

But apart from the automatic smile, these jokes brought no reaction from the notary from Chateauneuf and he waited politely until they were ready to go.

Madame Maigret brought the suitcase which Maigret had lugged around in the course of so many official inquiries. He felt like addressing this poor old case and saying to it, "Well, old girl, they make us do some funny things in our job . . . Now you belong to Monsieur Legros and—"

Madame Maigret was asking, "When will you be coming back?"

"In a few days' time, Madame," intervened Monsieur Motte. "I promise to send him back to you soon, for I'm quite sure he won't be long discovering the truth."

"Thank you very much!" said the Inspector under his breath.

He climbed into Monsieur Motte's car and the notary, getting into the driver's seat, felt obliged to say, "You've nothing to be afraid of, I never drive fast."

"I don't mind at all if you do."

They soon arrived at Orleans where they stopped in the market square opposite a garage. While the notary went in, Maigret took himself off to a café which served the best brown ale in the whole region.

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"Emilienne, Clotilde, and Armande," he recited. "No. Armande comes in the middle. Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde. It'll be amusing to see whether they look like their father."

For, deep down, even though he grumbled and wished his notary to blazes, he was nevertheless curious to see this house which had belonged to the father and grandfather of Monsieur Motte, with the study on the ground floor and the private office on the first floor and also a garden—since there was a gardener—and see the septuagenarian cook and the young maid who were beyond suspicion.

"That's odd!" he remarked to himself. "He hasn't said a single word to me about his wife. Perhaps she's dead."

Monsieur Motte had come out of the garage where he had hired a car and chauffeur and was looking about for Maigret. Not realizing he was being watched, Motte betrayed a certain amount of anxiety and so forgot his nervous smile.

Finally, he caught sight of Maigret sitting outside the café and informed him that car and chauffeur would be ready in a quarter of an hour.

The Inspector took advantage of this to have another glass of ale and sat smoking his pipe in the sun at his little marble-topped table.

"Supposing the house turns out to be gloomy and the daughters ugly—"

Two hours later, passing out of the brightest dining room he had ever seen and following Monsieur Motte into the drawing room, where he was offered a box of cigars, he gave up treating the whole thing as a joke.

He would probably have been very surprised to have been told that he had been there only an hour and a half and yet that very morning he had never even heard of Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde.

It was Emilienne who handed him a cup of coffee with a pretty little bow, smiling at him in her own special way.

Clotilde lowered the blinds in order to screen off the hot afternoon sun.

In the diffused light Armande was beautiful. Hers was a simple, fresh beauty, natural and seemingly unstudied.

"If you prefer your pipe," murmured the notary.

Of course he preferred his pipe! But he did not want to smoke it because of the three girls and Madame Motte, who was sitting in

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an armchair, smiling pleasantly.

For there *was* a Madame Motte, a quiet, self-effacing woman who seemed to wander through life with a dreamy smile.

"Two lumps?"

"Just one, if you don't mind."

Hundreds of times, on passing those large elegant houses, standing on the banks of the Loire, Maigret had said to himself: "Life must be pleasant and easy in there, surrounded by beautiful things."

The house of the notary from Chateauneuf was the country house *par excellence*, the kind they used to build in days gone by with no meanness or flashiness, with nothing ugly or aggressive.

Tufts of grass grew between the stones of the courtyard. Sometimes you could hear a heavy cart going slowly down the narrow road outside.

The paneling on the walls was of light wood with just the right patina, and when one moved about the drawing room, it set the crystal pendants of the chandeliers quietly tinkling.

"In a moment, my friend, if you would like it, Armande will entertain you with some music. But I think she prefers to wait until her fiancé arrives. Do you like music?"

Of course! Why not? But Maigret had never had time to listen to much.

"Do you like Schubert?" Armande asked as she turned over the pages of an album.

"Of course, Mademoiselle."

He did not call her Armande yet, but he felt that would come and he would soon be saying Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde as if he, too, belonged to the family.

His glance sought out the thin figure of Monsieur Motte silhouetted against the pale gold of a blind. He caught the familiar tic, the familiar elusive smile.

And he was sure that, in this way, the notary of Chateauneuf was saying to him: "You see, I didn't lie to you."

Of course not. It was this perfect setting that was disquieting. So that Maigret had the impression that he was being imperceptibly drawn into a world that was too nearly perfect, too happy, where there was no place for the human failings with which he had been occupied for so many years.

It was then that it came to him. He suddenly started as if, here, in these gentle and peaceful surroundings, he had caught sight of

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an evil, repulsive thing—a scorpion, for instance, or a reptile.

Someone had been stealing!

And these words, which meant something mild at police headquarters, at the Quai des Orfevres, this offense, which was all in a day's work in the life of a policeman used to dealing with all the other forms of crime, took on a new meaning in this setting.

Someone had been stealing!

Was this little devil of a little notary reading the thoughts in his eyes? Maigret caught a sudden expression of sadness on his face.

Someone had been stealing!

It was rather as if someone had deliberately defiled and desecrated a beautiful thing. As if, for example, they had attacked Emilienne's innocence by treating her like a street girl, or again as if they had smeared dirt on the perfect pier glasses in the room, smashed the grand piano, or slashed the Persian carpet with its incredible blues.

Someone in the house had been stealing!

And Maigret almost wanted to apologize to his host for the jokes he had made in the morning.

For he had just discovered that the simple thefts of ivory curios could become more moving in certain circumstances than all the gory crimes with which the Police Judiciaire were so often concerned . . .

The notary's brass plate was not fixed near the main doorway which was flanked by two stone posts, but the office had its private entrance a little farther on. You could distinguish the office windows from all the other windows in the house by their panes of green glass.

They had not finished coffee when Armande gave a little jump on hearing steps in the road.

Gerard Donavent might have saved himself the bother of ringing for his fiancée recognized his footfall at a distance. However, a solemn deep-sounding bell echoed in the porch and without paying attention to anyone else, the girl jumped up and went to open the door.

She came back glowing, accompanied by the young man, as if she wanted to say to Maigret, or rather Monsieur Legros: "You see Gerard is worth falling in love with!"

What further embarrassed Maigret was to feel Monsieur

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Motte's insistent stare on him. And it embarrassed him all the more because, when Donavent came in, he had been unable to repress a start of surprise.

Donavent was magnificent—a tall young man in his prime, with a face tanned from open-air life and with clear eyes. His bearing was graceful. Without respect for formality, he was wearing a thin sweater which made him look even more athletic.

"Gerard, may I introduce a friend of my father's, an old Army friend, Monsieur Legros, who has come to spend a few days."

The two men shook hands vigorously. They looked each other straight in the eye and Maigret felt the young man's gaiety give way for a second to anxiety.

"How do you do," Maigret said.

As he was going back to his seat the Inspector noticed that someone was missing from the drawing room—the youngest of the sisters, Emilienne, who had gone silently out of the room.

As for Clotilde, she said, "Armande was waiting for you before sitting down to the piano. She's been studying that piece by Schubert that you like all morning."

Why did Monsieur Motte's expression still seem to be saying: "Well? What's your impression? Have you noticed anything?"

Maigret made him a little sign which the notary understood.

"You'll excuse us for not listening to the music this afternoon. My friend Legros has some rather important matters to discuss with me."

They climbed a stairway so perfectly polished that it reflected people's shortened silhouettes as they walked. Monsieur Motte stood aside to let Maigret in.

Before him stretched a huge office with narrow windows opening on the sun-baked courtyard and on an extension of the garden. Here one could still see the swing and playthings used by the girls when they were children.

The office furniture was of unrelieved ebony, but it was at once apparent that this was in order to set off the hundreds of ivory curios arranged in the glass cases covering the walls.

"I guessed that you had something to say to me," said the notary, pulling up a fawn-colored leather armchair for his guest.

Alas, from now on Maigret could no longer enjoy the quiet and perfect taste of this house without mental reservations, a house where such ingenuity had gone into maintaining order and happiness.

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He avoided looking at his host.

"On the contrary, I thought it was you who perhaps had a few details to add to the information which you confided in me this morning," Maigret responded.

The opening sentences of this conversation would have been difficult for anyone listening at the door to have understood.

The notary said, "You know Gerard?"

Maigret answered, "You guessed it then?"

"Yes, I know the young man," Maigret said.

The notary said, "He was the one who told me everything. I did not want to influence your judgment. I still wanted to see."

It was almost a trap and Maigret understood better now the strange feeling he had in Monsieur Motte's presence.

"Did this young man tell you his real name?"

"Gassin, yes—Gerard Gassin."

"Did he tell you that his father was better known under the nickname of 'Commodore' or the more famous one of 'the robber of Dutchmen'?"

"Yes, he did. When I told you this morning that I had no prejudices, I had in mind something far more significant than you could imagine . . . As a matter of fact, I don't believe that the son of a thief must necessarily be a thief. The frankness with which Gerard confessed to me, here in this office, won my sympathy. And now I think that you really are in possession of all the facts you need for your inquiry."

His nervous tic was not a smile but a quick grimace.

"I'm leaving you absolutely free. I promise not to try to influence you in anything and I will accept your verdict, whatever it is. It was only with this understanding that I called in a man like you."

Why, in addition to the emotional side of the situation, was there also present a side which Maigret was not yet able to define, a sense of disquiet, almost of discord?

Three times Maigret had arrested the Commodore. He was an extraordinary man, though, who only frequented big houses and elegant company and who, with a crook's peculiar mania, confined himself exclusively to bankers and Dutch wholesale merchants.

Was it because businessmen are often naive? Or merely because after a successful first coup, the Commodore had thought it unnecessary to change his tactics? Was he perhaps superstitious?

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He was a handsome man, as strong and tall as his son, but more refined in his attire and with a halo of pure white hair. He chose his victims in the Pullman cars between Amsterdam and Paris, and his swindles were so perfectly managed that it had been possible to bring him to trial only once.

"Do you know where the Commodore is now?" asked Maigret, lighting his pipe.

A nod from the notary.

"Gerard told me. For the past two years his father has been living the life of a wealthy man in a villa he has had built at San Remo. But Gerard was determined to be independent and he has never consented to profit from an illegal fortune.

"Now do you understand, Monsieur Maigret? Excuse me, Monsieur Legros? It's better to get used to the name, even when we are alone. Do you see the tragedy of my case? If this young man is sincere, if he is honest, I risk discouraging him forever by my suspicions, as well as breaking my daughter's heart. On the other hand, if I am being taken in—"

This time he gave a thin smile which was full of bitterness, as if to explain: "What's the good of a life like mine, a constant striving to attain the kind of perfection which you see around you, if I am to end by letting a crook into the house?"

Maigret went downstairs afterward by himself. He had asked if he might do so. For some time now neither the sound of the piano nor the voice of Armande had been heard.

He was surprised to find Emilienne in the drawing room alone. She gave a start on seeing him come in.

"Are you looking for my sister and Gerard?" she said.

"Well . . ."

"They're walking in the garden. I think Armande had a bit of a headache."

What sort of conversation could he have with Emilienne? As a boy, Maigret had had no sister and his female cousins lived on the other side of France. As a young man, he had hardly had anything to do with girls and he had chosen for his wife precisely somebody who was as uncomplicated as possible.

Finally, during the years he had spent at police headquarters, he rarely had to have anything to do with young ladies of fifteen or sixteen who had been brought up in such a genteel way.

Emilienne disturbed him with the bold yet timid way she looked at him, and with her figure in which there was still some-

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thing of the child but already much of the woman.

"I'm going out for a walk as well," he said carefully.

He passed by the old gardener who was raking over a path in which the pebbles were brighter than the ones Maigret had in his own garden, and he thought of asking the gardener where he got them from.

As he approached a rose bower he caught sight of Armande wiping her eyes with a handkerchief that was not hers, for she immediately gave it back to her companion. Furthermore the couple did not show any surprise or embarrassment in the presence of Maigret. On the contrary, as he was going to continue his walk it was Armande who called him back in a still tearful voice.

"Monsieur Maig—" she began.

He went into the bower of leaves and roses through which tiny rays of sun were filtering.

"I'm sorry—it just came out. I'll be more careful, I promise. I should like you to talk to Gerard, or rather listen to him. In the car you'd be at his studio in a few minutes. Wouldn't he, Gerard?"

And, indeed, a few minutes later Maigret was getting out in front of a farmworker's renovated little cottage. It stood alone on the banks of the Loire.

Inside, most of the walls had been removed to make a large studio; it received daylight on three sides and all the furniture was made from local white pinewood.

Easels stood about in the middle of the room and the walls were covered with sketches or partly finished paintings.

"So you knew who I was?" asked Maigret, sitting down on a stool.

"Your photo appeared in the papers at the same time as—" Gerard began.

As the Commodore's, of course! Maigret remembered.

At the time he had been annoyed that thieves and murderers had been put on their guard against his heavy profile.

"I confess," continued the young man, after a brief silence, "that I was expecting a surprise of this kind. Monsieur Motte is only doing his duty, after all.

"As for Armande, she is so sensitive, so intuitive, that she suspected what was happening as soon as you arrived.

"When I confirmed her suspicions, she wept, in spite of herself, for she is a woman. She has an over-simple idea of policemen and she is ready to believe you are going to arrest me.

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"What can I offer you? I've some quite good beer and I seem to remember—"

Maigret said, "How long has Mademoiselle Armande known who you are?"

"Since the first day. Well, the third day—that was the day when I realized I loved her . . . You know that Monsieur Motte brings his daughters up without too many restraints. She came here to see my pictures.

"I told her the whole truth and promised to repeat my confession the next day to her father. I may add that she hesitated and that, if I had listened to her, I probably would have put off this confession."

"In your opinion, how many ivory figures have disappeared from the notary's study?"

"Don't think I can't see the trap that lies behind your question. Monsieur Motte revealed only the first theft to his family in order not to be hampered in his investigations.

"But I've already told you Armande is extremely intuitive. She was quick to realize that other thefts were being committed. You had better know, then, that every day she found means of making a discreet inventory of the collection and so we know all that's going on."

"Of course, because of your profession and your art studies, you are in a position to determine the value of the different pieces in the collection?"

"So much so that I pointed out to Monsieur Motte number thirty-three in his catalogue which is obviously a German copy. After writing to the British Museum he had to agree that I was right."

Maigret drank his beer which was cold, for there was a refrigerator in a corner.

Although the poky little cottage was quite plain, it was comfortable and its elegance owed nothing to interior decorators or antique dealers.

"From what I can see," he went on tentatively, "you paint mainly portraits."

"Actually, I use local people for models. If I go on doing this, it won't be long before they'll all have passed through this studio."

"Has Mademoiselle Armande ever sat for you?"

Gerard looked slightly uncomfortable and said no, but with less frankness.

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"And this picture of the girl in pink. Isn't that Mademoiselle Emilienne?"

"It is. All right. I'll tell you the truth."

Gerard began to tell Maigret why he had never painted Armande and why there was a picture in his studio of her sister Emilienne.

"In the beginning I hesitated to ask Armande to come to my house alone. I found this excuse of her sister's portrait to avoid any gossip. Then, when a chaperon was no longer necessary—well, the picture was put aside . . . A little more beer?"

Then, suddenly sitting down on a table opposite Maigret, he said, with the glass in his hand, "You're probably wondering why I brought you here? I can assure you it's not to make out a case for myself. And it's not to show you all the nooks and crannies of my home in order to prove to you that the stolen ivories are not here. I may say that I'm never sure that they're *not* here. And every night and morning I carry out a proper search of the house myself . . ."

"You're afraid that—?"

"I'm not afraid of anything. I'm almost sure that the sole aim and object of the person who is taking so much trouble to steal unsaleable pieces is to compromise me and prevent my marriage.

"One day or other this person will find some means of bringing proof against me by having one of these damned curios discovered, carefully hidden away, in my own house."

"So, you are convinced that the aim and object of the thief is to prevent your marriage?"

"I've been unable to find any other explanation. It's been going on for a month now and I've had time to think over this problem.

"I know you well enough by reputation to be sure that you've already got the hang of the place, as they say. Monsieur Motte lives only for his family and his collection. Consequently he is rather unwilling to introduce strangers into the house.

"That explains why the oldest girl, Clotilde, has not yet received a single offer of marriage at the age of twenty-three."

"What are you leading up to?"

"This: my suspicions cannot apply to a very large number of people. Only one man, the head clerk, who is twenty-eight and is named Jean Vidier, can see Armande often and also gain access to Monsieur Motte's study on his own."

"So?"

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"No, Monsieur Maigret! It's not what you think. I know I must seem like a guilty man trying hard to throw suspicion on an innocent person. Besides, this conversation wouldn't have taken place if it weren't a question not only of my happiness but of Armande's.

"I'd say—and I'm not any less discerning than anyone else—that this Jean Vidier, who's good-looking and ambitious, wouldn't say no to becoming the son-in-law of the notary of Chateauneuf and perhaps one day taking his place in the business.

"I might add that for the past two years he hasn't missed a single chance of seeing Armande and that, on these occasions, his looks deliberately spoke volumes. I'm saying that I have the right and even the duty to stand up for myself.

"I've been into this business with more concern than you have, of course, but also with a closer acquaintance of the household and its comings and goings.

"I'm not trying to hoodwink you or get you on my side. What I want is for this business to be cleared up. It has become intolerable."

Maigret took advantage of the silence to light a fresh pipe and help himself to some more beer. He made a mental note that he must ask Gerard where he got the beer; beer like this was rarely to be found in the wine-growing districts.

"You think it's Jean Vidier, then?"

Why did Gerard look uncomfortable again?

"No, Inspector. I don't want you to start off on a preconceived idea. Look, I'll be perfectly frank with you. Before I came here, I wondered if this Jean Vidier didn't have the chance of a lucky break—not perhaps the chance of a grand passion. But Armande is too much alive, too eager for a full life, to remain single for very long . . . In a few years she would probably have accepted the offer of a simple, quiet courtship."

"Don't you think this clerk might have had designs on Clotilde?"

"Oh, no. Clotilde is prouder than her sister and would have been put off at the idea of marrying someone in her father's employ. Actually, she's the only one who's given me a bit of a cold shoulder, because really I'm only a penniless artist."

"Does she know who you really are?"

"No."

"Who in the family does know?"

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"Monsieur Motte and Armande. I don't think Monsieur Motte has told his wife. He doesn't confide in her much."

"And Jean Vidier?"

"So you've thought of that too. I wondered for a long time whether he knew. Now I'm certain he does. As a matter of fact, the notary, who is very meticulous, took the trouble after my confession to make a file of all the newspaper clippings about my father. Now, I saw this file one day on the desk, one morning when Jean Vidier was in there alone."

"So that, in your opinion, the case would seem obvious?"

Maigret was taken aback to hear Gerard reply categorically, "No!"

He looked at the young man in surprise and saw that the artist was embarrassed by his own exclamation.

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, Monsieur Maigret . . . I've been more interested in police cases than most people and you can understand why. So I've followed very closely the cases in which you have been engaged. I've noticed that you have always been fair, even to people like—like—"

"Like your father?"

"Yes. That's why I think you'll be fair to me too . . . I could have let you carry on your investigation alone but, when I recognized you, I at once told Armande I wanted to speak to you. You see, I'm impatient. In theory, I'm getting married in twenty-nine days. But actually I'm at the mercy of some event, some trick of my enemy—there is an enemy, but who it is I'm not sure . . .

"I've told you what I had to say about Jean Vidier and now I'll tell you equally frankly—Even if everything points to him, my intuition tells me that he's not the guilty one."

A bloated fly kept buzzing backward and forward between them. Through the window four people could be seen rowing in a skiff, shooting like an arrow down the Loire. In the heavy atmosphere one could only guess the "In. Out. In. Out" of the coxswain as he leaned forward.

"I told you I've been through all the conceivable explanations over and over again. I even wondered whether Madame Motte . . . No, it's too silly. You've seen her. It looks as if her husband chose her to go with his house—quiet and affable, quite uncomplicated. You see, Motte has a very high ideal of happiness and all his life he has striven hard to create and maintain it for himself

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and his family and those who surround him.

"I haven't yet had much experience of the world myself, Inspector . . . I'm young.

"But I've mixed with all sorts of people and I've never come across such intense desire for harmony in the smallest things."

Maigret was all the more disturbed because he recognized in these words an echo of his own thoughts, but expressed more vigorously.

"If I knew that what I'm going to say could go beyond these walls I would bite my tongue off. Again, I trust your sense of fair play. It's a question of defending a love which I swear to you is good and sincere. At my age it is difficult to believe in human wickedness and that's why I was almost ashamed to speak to you just now about Jean Vidier. I tried to find another explanation. And that's even worse. Suppose Monsieur Motte—"

Maigret started and then tried to sit quite still and expressionless.

"Suppose that this man who uses so much intelligence, taste, and determination to cling to the kind of happiness that he has worked out for himself, suppose he suddenly fears that an intruder, an outsider, is worming his way into his family, like a maggot in fruit . . . And suppose that on no account will he go against his principles, that he wants above all to remain, in the eyes of everyone, a man known for his tolerance . . .

"That's the conclusion I came to. I've nothing more to say. I can't imagine any other explanation of a situation which seems so absurd that I sometimes wonder whether I haven't taken leave of my senses . . ."

While he was speaking the last few sentences he had stood up and walked up and down the studio. Without thinking what he was doing, he had opened the table drawer.

Then it was that he picked up something, an object no bigger than a nut, and he tossed it carelessly over to Maigret.

"Look! What did I tell you?"

It must have been the rare piece that the notary of Chateauneuf had mentioned—a tiny piece of ivory inside which an oriental craftsman had succeeded in carving a minute scene with six figures.

Maigret held the tiny ivory carving in the palm of his hand, pleased to feel the smoothness of a material which had been polished by ten or twelve centuries.

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"Now it will be easy," Maigret said to Armande's fiancé, "to find out who came to your house."

"Oh, will it?" The young man gave a short laugh.

"Has Monsieur Motte been here during the last few days?"

"Last night he was here with his three daughters . . ."

"And Jean Vidier?"

Gerard hesitated. It would seem that this last confession was worrying him.

"I've no servant," he said at last with a sigh. "A daily woman comes every morning for two hours to do the cleaning. I eat at the inn."

"I don't see—"

"My daily woman, Mathilde, is Vidier's aunt. He comes from a very humble background. It's surprising he's not more bitter. I've nothing further to add. I'll drive you back."

"If you don't mind, I'll walk."

"Just as you like. But I must take the car back."

Maigret found himself alone in the streets of Chateauneuf which the sun at this hour divided into almost equal sections: light and heat on one side, with perhaps a cat or a sleepy dog; cool shade on the other, with businessmen sitting at ease.

"What did he really mean?" he wondered.

Yes, had Gerard Donavent been trying to set Maigret off on the track of the notary or of Jean Vidier?

All this time Maigret was walking round the covered-in market square which looked like a deserted skating rink. "In that case," he muttered, "he is even cleverer than his father."

So clever that—

There wasn't the slightest suspicion of a body in the affair. No human life, it appeared, was in danger. The case was concerned with happy people who worked unceasingly to protect their happiness.

And now, by the merest of chances, this striving for happiness had ended in the theft of oddly shaped objects brought over from China by traders and purchased at an outrageous price by a man with a mania for collecting.

What did it all mean?

Then Maigret noticed that he had unconsciously slipped into his pocket the little piece of ivory which, to collectors, was worth tens of thousands of francs.

He stood in front of the gate, in between the two stone pillars.

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With real pleasure he made the solemn full-sounding bell echo inside.

The little maid opened the varnished door, stood aside, and then announced as she closed it again: "Everyone is in the garden."

Maigret nevertheless went into the drawing room where he knew they would meet together after dinner that evening. He placed the ivory curio on the table with a green delicately veined marble top. Then he wondered whether he should not go to the study and meet Jean Vidier.

He was doubly disappointed. He could not really have said how he had imagined Vidier, but in any event the reality did not correspond to any idea which he might have had of the man.

In spite of the green windowpanes which reached a third of the way up the windows, the study was as light as the rest of the house and all round the walls were posters announcing the public sale of farms, agricultural implements, livestock, and fatstock.

Only one piece of furniture belonged to another era and that was a tall desk of black wood, flanked by its stool with peculiar shaped legs.

But one glance at the occupant of this stool was sufficient explanation: the second clerk in the study was a gray-haired old man wearing a black silk cap. He looked as if he had stepped out of an etching of the previous century, even down to the linen oversleeves.

He did not take the trouble to turn round when Maigret came in.

Jean Vidier, on the contrary, jumped up quickly, bowed and smiled and bowed again, not knowing how to do Maigret the honors.

"I am—" began the Inspector.

"I know, I know! Monsieur Motte warned me."

Warned him of what?

How would he really describe this young man? He was so commonplace that it was disappointing.

He must have been a good boy at school and even a model pupil; certainly, during that time, he must have been his teacher's favorite and been held up as an example. It was surely he who did all the little jobs in class like filling the teacher's glass with water, sharpening the pencils, and cleaning the blackboard.

A "deserving young man" in the full sense of the word whom you could equally well imagine running a youth club or taking

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Boy Scouts out into the country in the summer. Who knew? Perhaps he belonged to an amateur dramatic group and he'd be sure to have an appealing baritone voice.

Clean, neat, and well groomed, always ready to devote himself to a good cause, ready to bow and say thank you, ready in fact to make himself useful and agreeable.

"Of course," he was saying, "I am entirely at your service . . . Will you excuse me a minute?"

He added a signature to a document which he handed to his fossilized colleague and indicated to the Inspector by the appropriate mime that he would like to speak to him anywhere but in the study.

"Let me show you round," he said. "As a wholesale timber merchant I am sure that will interest you and—"

They stood in a little corridor where there was a spiral staircase. The young man's tone of voice changed and he said with less assurance, "Do you want to go upstairs? The boss is in the garden . . ."

And Maigret could see that the top of the little staircase led straight into Monsieur Motte's study.

Jean Vidier walked round as if he were at home and showed Maigret to the leather armchair which he had sat in earlier.

"I'd like to tell you, Inspector, that the moment you arrived I guessed who you were. In any event, I knew the boss wanted to call in a private detective. Recently, I've found newspapers open at the small ads with crosses by the side of advertisements for private detective agencies. So you see?"

He was terribly proud of his discernment. He did not for one moment imagine that Maigret was not at all flattered to be compared with private detectives in newspaper advertisements at twenty francs a line.

"You see, I've been quite fair with you! I could have pretended to swallow this timber-merchant story. As I've said, I'm frank—too frank probably, for it's not always wise to show one's true feelings."

"Why are young men like this so unattractive, with their bursting self-assurance," Maigret wondered as he watched him.

"So I know why you are here. And I must tell you at once as plainly as possible: Inspector, be careful! The person who called you in thought he was doing the right thing. But has he any idea

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of what you might find? You've seen a happy, contented household. What would you say if some sudden drama were to bring it sorrow?"

Napoleon, in the most fateful moments of his life, could not have looked more important than this young man who had impudently installed himself in his employer's armchair and was nonchalantly playing with a paper knife.

He did not seem to mind whether he received an answer or not. He was entirely carried away. Probably ever since morning he had been going over his speech so that he could get it off pat—with quick glances from time to time at a window-pane in which his image was reflected.

"You must realize," he went on, "that I know nothing definite. Apart from that I know my place well enough to behave responsibly. But for ten years I've been Monsieur Motte's right-hand man. I can even go so far as to say that for some time now I've been the one who has kept the office going. I'm also responsible for all the confidential correspondence involving the collection which you see around you. So—"

And this "So" meant: "So make no mistake about it, don't take me for an ordinary employee! I've no idea what you've been told about me but now you know my position."

"Excuse me," began Maigret. Up to now he had not been able to open his mouth.

"One moment . . . I must tell you that in my heart of hearts I believe this investigation to be not only useless but also dangerous. Suppose you were called away on business at a moment's notice—there'd be nothing to worry about."

"Thank you very much!"

"I'm not trying to hurt your feelings. But I know the household and you don't. And you'll have to take the responsibility for what happens if you persist and if by some lucky chance you were to succeed in—"

He probably was not being deliberately spiteful. A spiteful person would probably have been incapable of finding, in so short a time, so many words which could wound the Inspector.

No. He was merely a brash young man who was pleased with himself. He believed in himself, in his worth, in his judgment, and probably also in his honesty.

"Now, if you don't mind, I'd rather that what I've just told you should be kept to ourselves. Mind you, it's only a request. There is

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nothing to prevent you from repeating to Monsieur Motte all that I've just said and, I'll say it again, you'll only have yourself to blame if—"

"I know," Maigret sighed. His head was spinning.

"What *do* you know?" the notary's employee asked Maigret.

"Nothing, Monsieur Vidier. I know that I know absolutely nothing and I thank you for your kind intervention."

"So?"

"So nothing. I suppose, by the way, that you haven't been amusing yourself by stealing the ivories yourself?"

"Do you suspect me?"

"No, no. Calm down."

"Because, if so, I should prefer to put the matter in the hands of the local police at once."

He was all red and perspiring.

"I suppose also that, apart from your little speech, which has made the deepest impression on me, you have nothing of importance to communicate to me?"

"Absolutely nothing!"

"Well, you see, we understand each other perfectly. Our little talk is at an end, Monsieur Vidier. You may go."

"But—"

"I said that you may go."

"Are you staying in this office?"

"If you don't mind. And I should like to stay here alone."

"Well—"

Vidier stood up reluctantly and said again, "Well—"

"Goodbye, Monsieur Vidier."

Maigret could scarcely wait for the door to close before giving way to uncontrollable silent laughter.

Contrary to what he had just said, he had nothing to do and did not even have the curiosity to look at the ivory pieces: there were so many of them in the glass cases that it made him feel ill to look at them.

He contented himself with filling his pipe and lighting it. Then he went and stood in front of the open window: from there he could see, in the distance, the pebbles glinting in the pathways.

"I mustn't forget to ask him where he gets such good pebbles."

His own garden was much smaller, of course. His house was too. And he hadn't three daughters. Like this strange Monsieur Motte.

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Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde . . .

The menu for dinner, without being unnecessarily extravagant, was perfectly chosen down to the smallest detail; the table was immaculately laid and Monsieur Motte knew how to choose wines for his cellar.

Gerard Donavent was present and Maigret guessed that the young man was one of them like this every evening; that ever since he became officially engaged, a place was laid for him at the last meal of the day.

For this occasion the artist had put on a town suit and a white shirt which showed up his dark skin. If she could have seen him dressed like this, Madame Maigret would surely have found a likeness between him and some young film star.

No one had yet gone into the drawing room and the Inspector supposed that his little ivory must still be sitting on the green-marble table.

Monsieur Motte had rather more color than he had in the morning, for he had just been lying in the sun in the garden, where drinks had been served.

As for Maigret, the blood had rushed to his head, a thing that often happened to him nowadays after walking about on a hot day. Donavent's beer probably had something to do with it, even discounting the ambiguous situation in which he found himself.

After all, who was still taken in by the timber-merchant-Army-friend fiction?

Neither Gerard nor Armande. Nor Jean Vidier.

At the very most, then, there remained Madame Motte, who did not seem to be bothered about anything, and Emilienne and Clotilde.

And yet these two girls had a way of looking at their guest that made him feel uncomfortable, especially when the notary forced him to talk about his timber business.

Maigret rather felt as if he had unwisely gone into an exclusive china shop where there was just room for him to edge his way round by holding in his stomach and by avoiding the slightest movement of his arms.

At midday he had been impressed by the discreetness and good taste of the luxury which surrounded him. In the evening he was already beginning to have enough of it and he promised himself the pleasure of smoking his pipe after dinner in the drawing room.

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Let them get on with it! Why had they come and fetched him, after all? Gerard and Armande were in love!

So Monsieur Motte really had no objections and kept on filling his glass cases with objects which Maigret found almost hideous and, in any event, useless. It was almost as if the Inspector had filled his own cupboards with tin soldiers.

They made him turn up in a car with a chauffeur! They fitted him out with a different name and a different vocation.

And the first thing that everybody took care to do when he saw them in private was to say to him: "This farce isn't put on for my benefit, is it? I know perfectly well who you are and what you are doing here."

And yet . . .

He could not have explained what he felt, but he was impressed in spite of everything, as if he had caught a whiff of drama in the air.

He could not altogether fathom this notary of Chateauneuf, who was as quaint and polished as his ivory figures, with his hardly perceptible tic which must mean something.

Was the notary making fun of everyone? Was there another person hidden under this enigmatic exterior?

In any event, he did not take his eyes off his guest and sometimes his glance implied a pathetic question.

As for Armande, she preferred to look at the Inspector as vacantly as possible, for then her face automatically assumed a pleading look, as if he had been appointed the arbiter of her destiny.

"That girl," thought Maigret, "would follow her fiancé to the ends of the earth, even if he had stolen all the ivory figures in the world."

And Gerard—the only one who had really talked freely—was his good humor put on or was it natural to him? He had the same easy manners as his father, the same well-bred elegance which had helped the Commodore to find his victims among the stolid Dutch bankers.

Only a quick glance from time to time, like someone looking at a barometer in passing, merely to make sure that nothing sensational was happening in Maigret's direction.

Clotilde was ordinary, like her mother. The best thing that could happen for her would be to marry and have three or four children in the midst of whom, without any complications, she

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would find perfect happiness and, in any event, peace of mind.

As for Emilienne . . . She was too young—or too knowing for her age. You could hardly treat her as a little girl any longer and it seemed silly to treat her as a young lady.

Maigret noticed that she wasn't eating. He also registered the fact that no one was taking any notice of it, which showed that she was the spoiled child of the house and usually had her own way.

She had a long pale face, large green eyes, and fingers so long and thin that Maigret kept looking at them in spite of himself, for he had never seen anything like them before.

"Tomorrow," announced Monsieur Motte, "you will be able to go boating with my daughters on the Loire. I am sure that Gerard will want to go with you."

Why didn't they make him play blind man's buff or some other childish game while they were about it?

"I'll see," Maigret said.

"Of course, you are quite free to go where you like. I merely wanted you to know that we have a motorboat and a boathouse down by the water."

Maigret wondered: "Is he trying to get me out of the way? Or does he want to point out to me that perhaps there's something in the boathouse I should investigate?"

They rose from the table. As always, there was a certain amount of moving around just before going into the drawing room and everyone made polite remarks to each other. So that, in the end, it was Emilienne who went in first and walked over to the table to ring for coffee.

When Maigret made his way over to this table, the ivory figure was no longer there.

And when he turned round, he saw Emilienne kissing first her father on the forehead, then her mother. She then came and gave him a formal nod and omitted saying good night to the others.

"She always goes to bed early," explained Armande, handing the Inspector a cup. "One lump, isn't it? Father told me that you insisted on my playing the piano."

The girl had been playing for perhaps half an hour when the Inspector began to make a move, although he was apprehensive of disturbing the springs in the armchair or treading on a creaking board.

As he left the drawing room it looked like an Eighteenth Cen-

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tury print, with its chandelier and the family seated like wax figures.

For a long time now the Inspector had noticed—when he looked out into the courtyard—a pool of light which shone down from the first floor and which must be the reflection from the windows of the notary's private room.

The piano was still playing when Maigret crept upstairs and turned the doorknob.

At his first glance he saw Jean Vidier seated behind his employer's desk. Round his head hung a cloud of smoke from a cigarette, the ash from which threatened to fall on the documents he was studying.

"What is it you want?" Vidier asked without getting up.

Maigret shut the door.

He understood from the attitude of the young man that he was used to working like this in the evening in the notary's study, where Monsieur Motte would come and join him.

"I have a fairly urgent bit of work," went on the head clerk with some show of impatience.

"Will it take long?"

"I'm waiting for Monsieur Motte in order to finish it and it will take us a good part of the night."

"That's a pity."

"Why?"

"Because you won't have the time to work so long."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Have you a telephone? Yes, I can see it. Fancy this now—I'm going to ask the police at Chateauneuf to be so good as to come and put you under arrest."

"Me?" Vidier had stood up, dazed with astonishment. "Me? You want to have *me* arrested?"

Luckily the piano was still playing and it drowned his indignant voice.

"But of course! . . . You must be aware, Monsieur Vidier, that in the matter of theft, complicity is just as much an offense as the theft itself. Now, complicity can consist of the simple fact of allowing the theft to be committed and not saying anything about it."

"But—"

"Let me finish. You know who stole your employer's ivory figures."

Vidier laughed mockingly.

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"They've never been stolen!"

"That's just what I mean. Let's say that you know who displaced your employer's ivory figures. You were well aware that these disappearances could be very prejudicial to someone. I mean, they risked destroying his happiness."

"No!"

Vidier was growing angry. He stared at Maigret defiantly.

"Look Monsieur, you mustn't think that you can impress me with your threats! Armande was quite determined to follow her lover anywhere if Monsieur Motte had not given his consent. I know because I heard her say so."

"To whom?"

"To Gerard! So, you see, there is nobody's happiness at stake. As for the ivory figures you know perfectly well that they will be put back some day, since nothing can be done about it. Besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

The piano, which had stopped playing a moment, began again more quietly, and a voice reached them, that of Armande, rather a faint voice singing a Schubert song.

"Besides nothing! As for arresting me . . . Supposing I told you that I'm ready, that I'm waiting for your policemen? Now admit that you wouldn't dare telephone! Own up that you're not on the right track, Inspector Maigret!"

Maigret answered simply, "You're right."

It was this calmness that made the head clerk's anger subside and also took away his self-assurance and bravado.

"What do you mean?"

"I said you're right. You can't be charged with complicity."

"Why not?"

"Because you cannot be an accomplice to an offense or crime which does not exist."

"I don't understand."

"Yes, you do, my friend. You know quite well, you who must be familiar with the legal code, that the charge of larceny is not preferred when it takes place between members of the same family."

The young man collapsed as quickly as he had lost his temper. Now he was miserable and ready to cry. He looked at Maigret like a boy who has just had his ears pulled.

"Who told you?"

"Who did you expect it to be? Not Madame Motte, surely?"

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Vidier nodded.

"Not Clotilde either. She isn't nasty enough. You mustn't say anything against Mademoiselle Clotilde. If only there weren't difficulties in choosing the right girl . . ."

Maigret understood that Vidier would prefer to have been in love with the oldest of the Mottes rather than the second oldest, Armande.

"You see, there's no one else," he said. "Only Emilienne."

"She's not responsible," the clerk muttered.

"Did I say she was responsible? I think she's not even twenty-one, is she?"

"She's full of romantic ideas. One evening I surprised her with an ivory figure in her hand and she swore to me that if I mentioned it to anyone she would kill herself."

"It's her youth."

"To kill herself?"

"*To say* she would! To be in love as she is in love! To be as jealous of Armande as she is—jealous to the point of causing the object of her love to be driven away rather than see him happy with her sister.

"And what an idea—to take her as chaperon and have her portrait painted."

"So they told you?"

In the same instant Vidier sat up, listening. Then, rushing past Maigret so quickly that he almost knocked him over, he opened the door and slammed it shut behind him.

A few seconds later, a scuffle was heard from the next room. Then, suddenly, there was a shot, followed by a heavy silence.

Downstairs the piano had stopped . . .

The night was warm in spite of the open office windows which let in the scents from the garden. From time to time you could see on the main road a lighted car traveling at full speed.

In the road, in front of the doorway with its two stone pillars, Maigret's car was waiting: its lights were on and the uniformed chauffeur was standing on the pavement.

Monsieur Motte was very pale. His nervous tic was pulling his lip up more often than ever and he was making a determined effort to give the impression of a smile.

"I'm sorry, Inspector. But everything's turned out all right this way, hasn't it? It's all much better than if—"

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He did not finish. He was trying to hold back a tear.

"I wanted to know at any price . . . And I never suspected that, after all, it was only a young girl's romantic love.

"I'm old and Emilienne is very young: that probably explains why, although I spoiled her, I understood her less than her sisters."

He turned toward Jean Vidier who was sitting there in a corner, not yet recovered from his emotional upset.

"If it hadn't been for you, my good Jean—"

"Not at all, Monsieur. I am sure she wouldn't have fired the shot. When I heard a noise in your room I immediately thought—I don't know why—that it wasn't you. Mademoiselle Emilienne had just taken the revolver from your bedside table. I rushed at her and I was the one who fired the gun during the struggle. I'm sorry about your mirror."

Then: "If Monsieur Maigret had not come here—"

Monsieur Motte finally managed his little smile.

"If my friend from Bergerac had not come here," he corrected.

He did not complete his thought. On the desk were spread out the missing pieces of the collection which Emilienne had given back after keeping them hidden in her linen closet.

Monsieur Motte stood up.

"Tomorrow I will have a new mirror put in." Perhaps he was going to speak of the cost, then thought better of it.

"Tomorrow, also, Monsieur Maigret, I'll send you a fee. I'm too tired this evening. I'm sorry you insist on leaving so soon."

An hour later Madame Maigret switched on the light as soon as she heard the door open suddenly, and she heard Maigret's gruff voice call out as he came upstairs: "It's only me!"

"Have you found that old man's ivory thingumajigs already?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where were they?"

"I'll tell you all about it later."

Maigret was still so soaked in the atmosphere he had left behind that he could hardly believe he had only left his house that morning.

And that night he dreamed, not of bright, shining pebbles, but of the three daughters of the notary of Chateauneuf—Emilienne, Armande, and Clotilde . . .

(translated by Mary Scudamore)

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William Brittain

The Man Who Read G. K. Chesterton

It is some time since we have published a new "man who" story—though really it should be called a "man-woman-or-boy who" story. The first two in the series, you may remember, were about men who read John Dickson Carr and Ellery Queen. Later came readers of Rex Stout, Agatha Christie, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Now William Brittain resumes the series with "The Man Who Read G. K. Chesterton," and you'll be happy to learn that the "man who" is a priest and that Father Brown is omnipresent in spirit and inspiration . . .

"With Father O'Toole on the youth-group outing and Mrs. Surmin having a day off, there's just the two of us to keep the rectory running properly, Charles." Monsignor Francis Gogherty lowered himself gingerly into the chair at the head of the long dining table, made the sign of the cross, and murmured a short benediction. "I hope you don't mind cold ham and deviled eggs," he went on. "That's what Mrs. Surmin left in the icebox for us."

At the far end of the table Father Charles Kenney smiled at his pastor's use of the word "icebox." At the age of 72 Monsignor Gogherty was not about to let some newfangled invention like a refrigerator change his speech patterns.

"I note that you're wearing not only your collar but also your suit coat at table, Charles," the Monsignor continued. "A commendable practice. But since, in spite of my urging, both you and Father O'Toole usually adopt a somewhat less formal mode of dress, I suspect something's on your mind, and you're trying to butter me up before discussing it with me. Out with it, lad. What is it?"

Father Kenney ran his fingers through his close-cropped hair. Lad, indeed! His 42nd birthday was just a month away. But to the

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Monsignor anyone not old enough to collect Social Security was a mere child.

"It's about Tim Harrington," Father Kenney began haltingly. "I've been reading up on the case in today's paper. And I don't believe we have the right to refuse—"

"Oh?" Monsignor Gogherty's eyebrows shot up. "So now it's a case, is it? May I suggest, Charles, that you stick to Holy Writ and keep your nose out of those penny-dreadful detective stories you've become so fond of."

"Sir, I hardly think you can classify Gilbert K. Chesterton as an author of penny-dreadfuls," replied Father Kenney. "Why, his critical essays alone would earn him a place in literary history, to say nothing of his works on St. Francis and St. Thomas Aquinas. And then—"

"Then there's that priest who goes around playing detective," interrupted Monsignor Gogherty. "The one your room's littered with stories about. Father Black, isn't it?"

"Father Brown, Monsignor."

"Brown, Black, what's the difference? We all have a place in this world, Charles, and that of the priest is not messing about trying to do the work of the police."

"But, sir, the beauty of the Father Brown stories is in the insights the priest has about the other characters. In *The Hammer of God* you actually feel a certain amount of pity for the murderer. Then there's *The Man in the Passage* in which several people reveal new facets about their personalities after witnessing the same—"

"Charles, I've had enough of Father Brown. I take it, though, that there's some connection in your mind between him and the Harrington suicide."

Father Kenney allowed himself a soft chuckle. "Yes, I suppose so. You see, I know—knew—Tim Harrington quite well. We served on several committees together, and I've been to his house for meals a few times. He has a fine wife and two delightful little girls. And—well, he just couldn't have committed suicide. It wasn't in his character."

"Charles, I read the papers too, you know. Especially when the news has to do with one of St. Bartholomew's parishioners. And the evidence in the Harrington case is quite clear. Suicide, pure and simple."

"But evidence can be—"

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"Evidence is evidence!" Monsignor Gogherty shouted. "I'm sorry, Charles. Forgive me for raising my voice. But it was all in the newspaper. Yesterday morning Timothy Harrington entered his office on the top floor of the Professional Building at nine o'clock. The elevator operator remembers the time. About thirty minutes later a shot was heard. The building guard investigated and finally let himself into Harrington's office with a master key when nobody answered his knocking. He found Harrington lying on the floor, shot through the head. There were powder burns about the wound and a smoking gun in his hand. What do you need to convince you, lad? Motion pictures of the actual shooting?"

"Speaking of pictures, Monsignor, there's the one found under the body," said Father Kenney. "Tim Harrington would never—"

"That picture is the crux of the whole matter," said the older man. "Obviously the papers couldn't print the picture, but their description left no doubt as to what it was. Lewd, filthy."

"Hard-core pornography, no doubt about it. But that's my point. Tim Harrington would never traffic in anything like that."

"But it was there in his office. He must have been looking at it. I suggest to you that in spite of what you think, he was peddling that trash to innocent people. Corrupting clean minds for money. And perhaps his conscience finally troubled him to the extent that he could no longer tolerate life itself. Or, more likely, he received notification that someone was threatening to expose him. In either case, suicide would be fully explained."

"Then you still intend to—"

"Deny Timothy Harrington the last rites of the Church? Of course that's what I intend. The issue is quite clear. Oh, I realize that a more liberal person might take the position that suicide is *ipso facto* proof of mental disorder. But then what becomes of personal responsibility? No, lad, St. Bartholomew's will not be party to a funeral Mass or the burial of a suicide while I'm the pastor."

"But, Monsignor, consider his family. Aren't they going through enough without adding to their trouble?"

"I feel sorry for the family, of course. But not enough to disregard Church doctrine. The one who should have considered the family was Timothy Harrington—before he killed himself."

"Sir, I must protest. You have no right to condemn Tim Harrington in the eyes of the Church. You have no right to hurt his wife and daughters by—"

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Monsignor Gogherty's fist struck the table with a blow that rattled the glasses and silverware. "As the pastor of St. Bartholomew's I have every right!" he thundered. "Someday, Charles, with luck you'll have a parish of your own. In the meantime I will make the decisions in this one."

There was a long silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock in the corner of the room. Father Kenney realized he had been wrong to be drawn into open argument with his pastor. And yet he also knew through years of working with Timothy Harrington that the man had earned and now deserved a Christian burial. If only he could convince Monsignor Gogherty. Or even better, if he could—

"Monsignor," he said softly, "please forgive my harsh words."

"Eh? Well—oh, I suppose so," was the growled reply.

"But I wonder what will happen when Bishop Dalton gets word of your decision," Father Kenney went on smoothly.

"The Bishop? Why, he'll approve, of course. Why wouldn't he?"

"Remember, sir, that only last year Tim Harrington was appointed to that special diocesan committee by Bishop Dalton himself. Now how's the Bishop going to feel when he learns that you refused Harrington a proper burial without any investigation whatsoever?"

Monsignor Gogherty considered the question gravely. It would hardly do for him to be overruled by the Bishop. And then another thought struck him. He looked oddly at Father Kenney.

"That's what this whole thing's been getting around to, isn't it, lad?" he asked.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Oh, don't play the innocent with me. You want to pretend you're that Father Brown chap. The priest who plays detective. Isn't that it?"

This last remark brought Father Kenney up short. Was he interested only in the eventual fate of the late Tim Harrington, or did he really have the urge to emulate Chesterton's little priest and solve a crime? The idea that he might be motivated even in part by the latter reason was totally unworthy of a man of God. And yet Father Kenney was honest enough to admit he didn't know the answer to the pastor's question.

"Well, you may have a point, lad," Monsignor Gogherty went on, "whatever your reasons. So I'll allow you your investigation, although I doubt you'll turn up anything the police haven't al-

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ready found. But I'll not accept any nonsense about insanity. I'll reverse my decision only if you find convincing proof that Harrington didn't kill himself."

"Thank you, sir," Father Kenney replied. "When can I get started?"

"Tomorrow's your free day. You can devote your full time to it. I'll expect your report at the evening meal."

"You mean I have only one day?"

"Of course. Later this week you have those weddings, and then there's novena. And I'll expect you to serve your regular time on duty. So tomorrow's as long as I can spare you. And one more thing, lad."

"Yes, Monsignor?"

"That wide-brimmed hat he wore suited Father Brown very well. On you it would look foolish. Don't forget, Charles, you're a real priest, not a character in a detective story."

The fact that Father Kenney had been the official chaplain for the police force of the village for the past six years opened a lot of doors for him when he began his investigation the following morning. Patrolman Dom Virgilio, who often took up collections at Father Kenney's Masses, quickly ushered him into the squad-room, where he was introduced to Detective John Unsell who was in charge of the Harrington case. Unsell, a heavy-set man with a mop of unruly blond hair, looked up grimly from the report he was typing. It was obvious that Unsell had no desire to talk to the priest and was only doing it as a favor to Virgilio.

"You got most of the facts we have, just by reading the paper," Unsell began when Father Kenney had given his reason for calling. "Harrington got to his law office at nine. Forty minutes after that he was discovered shot through the head, and he had a pistol in his hand—a .38. It was his own gun, by the way, and he had a permit to keep it in his office. The bullet went completely through the skull and punctured the glass in the window in the east wall of the office. That's about it. What could we say except that he's committed suicide?"

"Oh? Then the bullet was never recovered?"

"Look, Father Kenney, at five stories the Professional Building is the tallest one around. That bullet went over the roofs and out of the business district. It's probably lodged in a tree somewhere."

"But the hole in the window? Are you sure—"

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Unsell stubbed out a cigarette in the ashtray and immediately lit another. "Give us credit for knowing our stuff, padre," he said. "When a bullet hits a pane of glass it doesn't knock the whole pane out. It just punches a neat little hole. And the lab crew was able to tell us that the hole is in keeping with a slightly misshapen .38 slug having passed through—from the inside out."

Father Kenney's face fell. The police certainly hadn't taken the apparent suicide at face value. What could his investigation possibly turn up that hadn't already been considered?

"You said the body was discovered at nine forty," he said. "But the papers place the time of the shot at nine thirty. What about that?"

Unsell thrust the newly lit cigarette into a paper container with dregs of cold coffee in the bottom and listened to the hiss. "You're really grasping at straws, aren't you, Father?" he said, trying to keep the annoyance out of his voice. He went on as if he were explaining something to a backward child. "The shot *was* heard at nine thirty. But nobody knew where it came from at the time. The guard and a couple of custodians had to check every office in the building. It took them ten minutes to get to the top floor. Okay?"

"And the picture, the one found under the body?" There was a note of desperation in Father Kenney's voice.

"The picture was a slide—you know, one of those transparent things in a little cardboard frame. The subject? Let's just say it's the type of thing weirdos peddle in dark alleyways. It showed a man and a woman who were—well, it wasn't the kind of thing I'd want my kids to look at." Unsell turned back to his report.

"Please, I know you're busy," said Father Kenney, "but this is very important to me. These transparent slides, don't they require a projector of some kind?"

"It's not absolutely necessary, but the fact is, Harrington had one. It was set up on his desk. A real complicated machine—remote control and all that. There was also a screen at the far end of the room."

At last Father Kenney thought he was getting somewhere. "Doesn't it seem a little unusual, Detective Unsell," he said shyly, "that a lawyer would have a slide projector and screen in his office?" He waited expectantly for the answer.

"No."

"I beg your pardon?"

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"No, it doesn't seem unusual. Harrington often took pictures to help him with some of his law cases. Almost everyone in the building knew he had a projector and screen. Of course, none of them knew he was using it to show dirty pictures." He turned again to the typewriter and began laboriously pecking at the letters. "That's all I can tell you, Father," he growled. "Look, you'll have to excuse me. This report's overdue."

Father Kenney slowly got to his feet. That was the end of it. The police had all the facts. All he had was a deep conviction that Tim Harrington would never, under any circumstances, have taken his own life. But knowledge of a man's character wasn't hard evidence.

Father Kenney looked forward with dread to the evening meal at the rectory and the gibes he'd hear from Monsignor Gogherty. He was certain the Monsignor would bring up Father Brown again.

But even Father Brown couldn't do more in the circumstances.

Or could he?

"Yes!" The priest shouted the word into the stagnant air of the squadroom, freezing in their places three detectives, a uniformed patrolman, and a suspected pickpocket who'd been brought in for questioning. Unsell, his index finger poised over the typewriter, looked up at Father Kenney in astonishment.

"Yes what, Father?" he asked.

"Yes, there is some other answer to Tim Harrington's death besides suicide," was the crisp reply. "And I intend to find it if it takes all day. Mr. Unsell, I would like to see the office where he died."

"Oh, come on, padre. That office is sealed. Nobody can go in there without an official okay."

"Look, Unsell," snapped the priest. "You're new around here—at least, I've never seen you before. But I've been police chaplain for the past six years. I've done everything the job requires, from giving talks at the Benevolent Association dinners to saying Masses for men killed or wounded in the line of duty. Now I'm asking for one little favor. And by all that's holy I'm going to get it—or you guys can get yourselves a new chaplain!"

Unsell looked the priest up and down. "Father Kenney," he began in a voice menacingly soft, "I don't have to—" He was interrupted by Detective Raymond Case tapping him on the shoulder.

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"He'll do it, Johnny," said Case. "He'll quit, just like he says. You don't know Father Chuck when he gets this sore."

"What do I care? I'm a Methodist."

"Yeah, but most of the guys here go to St. Bartholomew's. And you gotta work with us, remember?"

"But the room is officially sealed. Besides, this report—"

"So unseal the room. You're in charge of the case. And I'll finish your report myself. Okay?"

"Ahh." Unsell started to say more, looked at Father Kenney, then thought better of it. Grabbing his hat, he stalked to the door, followed by the now-smiling priest. "Let's go, padre," he grumbled.

Timothy Harrington's office, one of the largest in the Professional Building, remained as nearly as possible in the same condition it had been in two days earlier when his body had been discovered. There was even a chalked outline on the dark brown rug to show where he had lain in death.

"Try not to touch anything," warned Unsell. "The lab boys have dusted the place for prints, but they may want to come back and do some more looking around."

Father Kenney placed his hands firmly in his pockets and glanced around. The eastern wall of the office was dominated by a wide window, flanked by maroon velvet drapes which hung from a brass rod and were tied back with thick ropes that gleamed as if made of gold. On the large desk in front of the window sat a slide projector, pointed at a screen at the far end of the room. Two of the other walls were lined with shelves of books, and on the fourth were hung several diplomas and award plaques. A small door on this same wall led to a tiny lavatory and a storage closet.

"Well, Mr. Great Detective," said Unsell with heavy sarcasm, "this is it. We've found about six zillion latent prints in here, most of which we're trying to run down. Seems like Harrington had just about everybody in town for a client at one time or another. So come up with a clue, will you? Show me you can do my job better'n I can."

Father Kenney walked around the desk and peered at the window. The upper pane had a tiny hole in it, just above the horizontal dividing strip. Three cracks radiated from the hole to the edge of the glass. The priest rubbed his thumb and forefinger against the tied-back drapes and then touched the hole gingerly.

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"Hey, leave that alone!" barked Unsell. "You might knock out a chip of glass or something. How am I to know that hole won't turn out to be important at the inquest?"

The hand was rapidly pulled back. "Mr. Unsell," said Father Kenney softly, "about those pictures. Did Harrington develop his own?"

"Nope. He had 'em done at Benton's Photo Shop, just down the street. Matter of fact, Benton was sending some new ones over the same morning Harrington shot himself. Only the delivery man had to return 'em because by the time he got here the police had the office closed off. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I just thought that since the one picture was important to the case, the others might be, too."

"Maybe they were to Harrington, but not to us. Twenty slides of an automobile accident in a liability case he was handling, that's all. Besides, that one picture we found under the body wasn't developed at Benton's."

"Oh? How do you know?"

"The cardboard around the picture. Benton has a little ad for his shop on everything he processes. The one we found had a plain white frame."

"I see." Father Kenney's shoulders sagged. "And you haven't touched anything in here?"

"The body was removed after it had been photographed. The smooth surfaces were dusted for fingerprints. When we went through Harrington's papers looking for a suicide motive we were careful to put everything back just the way we found it. So can I take you home now and get back to work?"

Slowly Father Kenney nodded. He had failed, no mistake about that. The police had covered everything he could think of. He walked out of the office ahead of Unsell considering how lucky Father Brown had been that his author had strewn clues about for the fictional priest to find and interpret. G. K. Chesterton should be working on this case, he thought wryly.

They left the building and strode to Unsell's car at the curb. Unsell motioned the priest inside, closed the door behind him, then got in behind the wheel. Groping in his pocket for the keys, Unsell was unaware of Father Kenney's preoccupation with the morning sun glinting off the hood and front fenders of the car.

"Mr. Unsell," said the priest softly as the key slid into the ignition, "what kind of day was it when Harrington died?"

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"Huh?"

"The weather. What was it like?"

"Fine. Just like today. Sunny, not a cloud in the sky. Why?"

The starter began to whir. "Stop!" cried Father Kenney suddenly. "Turn it off. I've got to go back to that office."

Unsell gave a deep sigh. "You were already up there," he almost moaned.

"Yes, but before I didn't know what I was looking for. Now I do."

"But—"

"Listen, in ten more minutes I'll know positively if Harrington committed suicide. Isn't that what you've spent the last two days trying to find out?"

"Yeah, yeah. Okay, come on. But I'm only doing this because I want to keep on speaking terms with the other guys I work with."

The Harrington office was just as they had left it. Unsell looked at Father Kenney who turned to him, eyes shining with excitement.

"Stand over there near where Harrington's body was found," said the priest. "That's it. The time now, Mr. Unsell, is just a few minutes before ten—for all practical purposes the same time at which, two days ago, Tim Harrington supposedly shot himself."

"So?" the detective asked resignedly.

"So pretend for a minute that you're Harrington. You're preparing to show some slides. What would be the first thing you'd do?"

"Why . . . I guess I'd get out the projector and screen. I'd probably set them up just about the way they are here."

"Okay, fine. What next?"

"Probably I'd plug in the projector and start showing the pictures. Look, Father, I know you believe that Harrington couldn't have killed himself, but according to the evidence—"

"Unsell, you've been cursed with lack of imagination," said Father Kenney. "Don't you see, he couldn't possibly show the pictures!"

"Why not?"

"The window, man! Look out the window."

Unsell turned, shading his eyes. "We're too high up to see much," he said. "Besides, the sun's shining right in my eyes." After a pause the detective began to nod his head. "That's what you're getting at, isn't it? The sun."

"Of course. This room faces east. So the morning sun would be

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shining into the room through that window, making it impossible to project slides with any degree of clarity."

"Yeah," murmured Unsell. "You've got something. Harrington would have had to pull the drapes, that's for sure. But they were open when we got here. And nobody in the building said anything about touching them. But maybe Harrington opened them himself—before he shot himself."

"Maybe," said Father Kenney, walking to the window. "Let's pull the drapes." He released the gold tie-back ropes and pulled the thick draperies across the window. The room was immediately plunged into an eerie gloom.

"Now it occurs to me," Father Kenney went on, "that if Harrington were contemplating suicide after seeing the picture, he'd do it in this atmosphere, rather than having the sun beating in on him."

"You're just guessing, padre. That's not proof."

"True, Mr. Unsell. By the way, do you have a pocket flashlight?"

"Sure, on my keychain. Here."

There was a clinking of keys as the flashlight was passed to Father Kenney. He pressed the switch, and a circle of light the size of a silver dollar gleamed on the maroon cloth. Behind him the priest could hear Unsell's breathing.

Taking a ballpoint pen from his pocket, Father Kenney probed delicately at the drapery material. Suddenly the pen penetrated the cloth.

"There's a hole in the drapes right at this spot," he said. "Just opposite the hole in the glass."

"It must have been made by the same bullet that killed Harrington," said Unsell. "But if the drapes were closed when he was shot, then who—"

"Exactly the question I'm going to ask if I hear another word about Tim Harrington's 'suicide'," said Father Kenney, throwing open the drapes so that sunlight again flooded the room. "Who opened the drapes after Harrington was lying dead on the floor?"

"It had to be whoever shot him," said Unsell. "Unless the guard who found the body lied to us, which I doubt. But who could it have been, Father?"

"As I've often been reminded lately, that's your job, not mine," answered the priest. "But I might offer a logical line of inquiry. Let's assume that whoever made the deliveries of the slides from

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Benton's Photo Shop was the same person who's been responsible for peddling those pornographic pictures. On the day Harrington was shot, this person had two deliveries to make—the pictures of the auto accident to Mr. Harrington and a packet of the other pictures to someone else. He came to Harrington's office first. Suppose he gave Harrington the wrong package."

"Yeah, I see," Unsell was now excited. "And Harrington put the pictures in his projector while the delivery man was still there. When Harrington saw what the pictures were, he threatened the man with exposure—probably he took out the pistol to make sure the guy didn't leave the office."

Father Kenney nodded. "There could have been a struggle in which Harrington was shot through the head. Our unknown person used the few minutes he had before the guard got to this office to put the gun in Harrington's hand and pick up the pictures. He probably threw back the drapes so he could see if any pictures had dropped on the floor. But he missed the one under Harrington's body."

Suddenly Father Kenney held up an admonishing finger. "We've been talking as if we knew how the murder took place," he said. "Actually we haven't a shred of proof."

"We'll find proof," said Unsell.

"I wish you luck," said the priest. "I'll pray for your success, but that's all the help you'll be getting from me. My job was finished the moment you admitted that Tim Harrington's death wasn't a suicide. But if you don't mind, I'd rather you didn't inform Monsignor Gogherty of that fact. I'd like to tell him myself."

That evening, at dinner in the St. Bartholomew's rectory, Father Kenney was seated at one side of the large table at the end of which was Monsignor Gogherty. Across from Father Kenney sat the younger curate, Father O'Toole, oblivious of his pastor's disdain for the grimy sweatshirt he was wearing. Monsignor Gogherty murmured a benediction of which Father Kenney caught only the last few words: "Bless this day's endeavors and make them fruitful." Crossing himself, Father Kenney uttered a fervent "Amen."

"Now," said Monsignor Gogherty, seating himself, "while we wait for Mrs. Surmin to bring our food I have a question for Father Brown here." He smiled archly. "Forgive me, I mean for Father Kenney, our budding detective. What say you, lad? Give us the results—if any—of your investigation."

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Father Kenney's reply was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Surmin. "You'll have to wait a bit for the stew," she said. "I've been on the telephone. It was for you, Father Kenney—somebody named Unsell. You're to call him back."

"Did he say anything else?" asked Father Kenney.

"Just that he's been investigating some delivery man. He said to tell you the man's name is Colin Patten and his sister's the girl in some photograph—he said you'd know which one. There was something about the case looking better all the time. Then Mr. Unsell said that Timothy Harrington's murder—he laid a lot of stress on that word 'murder'—would probably be solved within a week."

"Thank you," said Father Kenney. He turned back to Monsignor Gogherty, whose mouth had opened in amazement at Mrs. Surmin's last remark.

"Now then, sir," said Father Kenney, "what was that you were asking about Father Brown and me?"

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Jeffry Scott

Trip Up on a Ripple

In 1971 Michael Gilbert, a regular contributor to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, suggested that Crime Writers Association of London run a short-story contest. The winning entry was Jeffry Scott's "Trip Up on a Ripple," about Inspector Lochiel of the Rosetta Street-Great Northern Avenue-Cap-a-Pie Lane district.

You will find Inspector Lochiel a one-hundred-percent English detective, in this case that took place when he was a young Detective Constable. You couldn't possibly think of him as anything but English—no more than you could think of, say, Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey as anything but English, or Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin as anything but French, or Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade as anything but American. And for change of reading pace none of us would want it any other way . . .

Detective: INSPECTOR LOCHIEL

The thing about Minifee—Inspector Lochiel explains—is that the man was a snout.

A damp, sensitive, pink, hungry snout. Or to be polite, an informer. Drop a pin *here* (a certain type of pin, released by a particular set of fingers) and Minifee would hear the impact *there*.

Inspector Lochiel has a boring face which makes him difficult to remember and accounts for much of his success. Imagine an egg left on a shelf beside a marble portrait bust for so long that, by some kind of sympathetic magic, it acquires a semblance of human features: you are contemplating Inspector Lochiel.

Even Minifee forgot about him for minutes on end, even while the young Detective Constable was at his elbow, and Minifee was no fool.

Lochiel gets around a lot, but not half as much as he did in the

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late 1940s, when his warrant card was spanking new. That was how he spotted and cultivated Emerald. However, this story is devious enough in its way, without juggling the time sequence. Start at the beginning and return to Minifee, whose pleasure and business was minding other people's.

A final word, though, about Inspector Lochiel. He reads a lot, but tends to forget details. He tells me of a scientific theory about ripples never ending. Drop a pebble in the tide at Dover, and there are implications for the San Francisco coastline. This seems unlikely—Lochiel may have got it wrong—but he derives great comfort from the thought.

"It means," he lectures, "that everything we do, however meaningless, *does* have significance. To advance it a step, anything a villain does has a sporting chance of hitting him smartly in the back of the neck. The way crime figures are going, we should thank our lucky stars for help of any kind—even ripples."

Lochiel also read—in a book by W. Somerset Maugham, he thinks—that the happiness of any two linked persons can be achieved only at the expense of a third.

If neither of these theories impresses you with its manifest truth and wisdom, Inspector Lochiel will recall the Minifee Saga, as he did to me.

George Albert Samuel Minifee, informer by appointment to sundry policemen working the triangle formed by Rosetta Street, Great Northern Avenue, and Cap-a-Pie Lane in the City of London. A shabby but quite wealthy district, full of warehouses, furriers, manufacturing jewelers, and the like.

Most snouts work for one detective, in a form of commercial marriage, but Minifee was promiscuous; he liked to spread his favors—to go courting, as it were. Very democratic, he'd even put trifles in the way of ambitious lads in the uniformed branch. No C.I.D.-only snobbery for him.

"Now here's a funny thing," says Lochiel. "Minifee didn't have a great sign outside his shop with INFORMATION STOLEN AND SOLD on it, but I'm sure that most of the Rosetta Street hounds guessed he was a snout. Did they steer clear of the bloke or give him a damned good spanking? Not on your life! He might run a tobacco and sweet shop, but it was more like a social club. Drop in for an ounce of 'baccy or a bar of chocolate and you'd generally find a few villains in the queue."

Lochiel suspects that Minifee never informed on a friend, a near

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neighbor, or a regular customer. As the earthy old proverb goes, a wise dog does not foul its own doorstep.

Moreover, Minifee stocked pornographic magazines in the shop's back room. Toward evening, home-going clerks would slip past the upraised counter flap, emerging pink around the ears and poorer by a pound or so.

The stuff was mild by today's standards, of course. But a couple of decades ago the neighborhood accepted the fact that if Minifee was left in peace to peddle *Maids in Bondage* and *Satin Sin,* he must have earned the privilege with bribes or cooperation.

In fact, his police tips gained considerably more than an unwritten license to fray the moral fiber of sprigs of the City scene. Many a mickle, and so forth—thirty shillings here, two pounds there, a fiver on occasion. . .

Minifee's customers gossiped, usually from the corners of their mouths. What they did not say, he had a knack of sensing. Careless talk, the bane of good security: Billy looking too prosperous, Ted losing his rent money at the dogs, Edgar not turning up t'other night to collect that free pint.

"Get away" or "Believe that, you'll swallow anything," Minifee would chortle. But having pondered and flicked through his mental filing cabinet, he was ready for business with his legal cronies.

"He'd have been a bloody good thief-taker, I promise you," says Inspector Lochiel. "Enjoyed deduction; given a different environment, another start in life, he could have been my boss. Me calling Minifee *sir* and standing up when he came into the interview room."

Lochiel detested the fellow.

No reason in the world—simply a case of dislike at first sight. If anything, Minifee went out of his way to be pleasant to the raw young D.C. with the disconcerting habit of blending with the wallpaper. "You want to ask Barry Tredgold what he's got in that lock-up garage of his," Minifee advised one day, as he sold Lochiel a cigarette machine and a packet of papers. "Better yet, stroll round there tonight. You might see some—er—Christmas parcels arriving."

Lochiel's visit to the wretched Tredgold was well rewarded. And since a detective without an informer is like a pretty girl with a poor complexion, Lochiel concealed his dislike.

"I buttered the old swine up," he admits. "The best butter, too, à la *Alice in Wonderland.* The Skipper let me bung my informant

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a few quid out of the fund, for Tredgold, but I raided my own Post Office Savings book to show Minifee I was grateful.

"I met him at The Other Pub—you know, far side of Rosetta Street, well away from the manor—the night after I'd felt Tredgold's collar. Minifee was a widower and spent most of his free time in pubs. We went into the Gents and I passed him the cash. 'Very nice of you,' says Minifee, 'but I'd have given you a leg up, anyway. I'd be proud of a son like you, straight I would.' "

This confused and angered young Lochiel, for reasons he was unable to analyze. He resolved to keep an eye on Minifee, while using his services.

Actually, Minifee had a son of his own, and one to be proud of. The lad was an engineering apprentice at Derby, talented and well thought of, who hitchhiked home to London on frequent weekends.

As I have indicated, Lochiel is unobtrusive enough to make paving stones or lampposts positively bizarre by comparison. He was always wandering into Minifee's shop, to the point where its owner ignored him.

And so the detective had a chance to talk to Emerald.

She looked after the shop when Minifee popped out to place a bet with one of the district's legion of furtive and illegal bookies' runners, or to take his lunchtime beer. He was rather good at popping out for a minute which stretched to thirty or more.

Emerald, living around the corner and too idle to keep a regular job, made an ideal recruit.

"Strange, what makes a girl attractive," Lochiel muses. "Her name was the fanciest thing about her. See her photograph and you'd dismiss her as a—what's the current slang?—a scrubber. I suppose she *was* a scrubber.

"About seventeen, eighteen, with that sallow skin that always looks as though it could do with a wash. But lord, you couldn't come within six feet without wanting to touch her. Not that Emerald was easy. She liked talking about sex, hinting and joking, and that's a bad sign. A teaser, worried if you didn't go after her and hard as nails if you did."

Lochiel soon found that she was as shrewdly inquisitive as her part-time employer. "She'd seen me going in and out of the Rosetta Street nick at all hours, which made me a copper. And she had a good idea that Minifee was a snout. Naturally, I laughed her off."

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Emerald was irritated by the reaction. "Look, cleverboots, he doesn't run a cabin cruiser on what he takes here over the counter," she snapped. "Even with his dirty pictures on the side, and all." And she struck a parody-provocative pose, drawing up the hem of her cheap dress.

Lochiel averted his eyes from suspender straps and a pale blade of thigh. "Cabin cruiser?" he jeered.

"Saw him down Teddington way last Whitsun," Emerald explained. "He didn't see me. Too busy playing Admiral Minifee on his precious boat. Must have cost him a pretty penny, 'cos I saw a picture of James Mason with exactly the same kind of cabin cruiser in *Screenworld* last week. A luxury cabin cruiser, see."

"What was it called, *The Victory?*"

But Lochiel wasn't getting all his work done for him. The girl couldn't remember the name on the boat's stern. He changed the subject.

"Go to the pictures with a copper? I got my reputation to consider," Emerald sniffed. "Listen, I hear things. All the blokes who take me out, they've got form, or mates with form. If I passed it on, like old Minifee does, could I make—you know, make myself a bob or two?"

"It's your duty to inform the police," Lochiel replied dampeningly. "Anyway, I don't work for the Vice Squad, love." And he slipped out on the wake of a delighted whinny.

The nearest newsstand sold him the current issue of *Screenworld* magazine, and he studied the photograph of Mr. Mason, afloat. A distinctive cabin cruiser, certainly; but "Teddington way" is a flexible area, and the Thames a long, long river. . .

Lochiel was courting a very plain, very pleasant probationer nurse (marrying her in 1952) and the next few dates took them cycling solemnly along towpaths and riverside lanes. Eventually they found the cabin cruiser, which led to a bungalow, which led to a talkative neighbor.

Back in the Rosetta Street-Great Northern Avenue-Cap-a-Pie Lane district, Minifee made no secret of enjoying Sunday roast and two veg with a married sister who lived at Streatham. He vanished after locking up the shop on Saturday evenings—unless his son was at home for the weekend—to reappear on Monday mornings.

Yet it would not be true to record that Lochiel was astonished to confirm that the snout's off-time was spent at Teddington, not

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at Streatham. At Teddington he was known as Morris, Samuel Morris, someone in the leather trade, running not only the cabin cruiser but a large bungalow and a new car at least four feet too long for its prewar garage.

"I'd guessed there was something off-center about Minifee," Lochiel comments. "It had niggled me, why he shut the shop on Sundays and lost all that trade. Him not being averse to a profit."

Said the probationer nurse, "What luck, the boat really being a twin of the one in the magazine."

"Emerald has a literal mind—if she said it was the same, that's good enough for me," her fiancé explained. He spoke absently, for he was far from satisfied.

All very well in its way, the knowledge of Minifee's double identities and lives. As far as it went, which was not nearly as far as Lochiel wished.

Weeks passed, becoming seasons, while Lochiel earned his pay and profited from Minifee's semiprofessional curiosity and sparred with Emerald. "I'll make you take notice some day," she whined. "Don't see why *I* shouldn't make a bit o' money." She produced the final word as frailer girls would say "love" or "marriage."

"I daresay you will," Lochiel agreed, trusting he was correct in his forecast.

There was a boy called Eddie, serious, clever, and besotted with Emerald. He gave her things, she saw to that. Quite expensive things, which simply whetted her appetite for more.

Lochiel, armored and enlightened by real love, observed and pitied him. Emerald, not caring a straw, pretended to be jealous, and Eddie gave her presents. It was sad.

"I wasn't *that* sentimental," Lochiel confesses. "I got worried because the way he was pouring out his money on her Emerald might forget about selling information to me. I was counting on her doing that, in the end. But the more Eddie spent, the less likely it became. I never stopped to ask myself how—" Here Inspector Lochiel pulls himself up, looks sly, and starts again.

Came the night when Emerald went to meet Eddie at the Odeon cinema (now a discount store) on the corner of Great Northern Avenue and Rosetta Street. He was due at eight o'clock. By nine Emerald knew that she had been stood up.

Double disaster: a personal snub, plus the end of nylons and trinkets, chocolates, and perfume in fancy bottles. She no longer

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needed to feign jealousy and possessiveness. Emerald hurried home, past Minifee's shuttered shop with the radio muttering away in the snuggery in the back, where he must be drowsing among the dirty magazines and jars of sweets.

She glared at the place, and the way it mocked her mood with those cheery cracks of light around the shutters. All right for him, smarmy old fool, feet up and money in the bank!

Emerald's parents were out, so there was nobody for her to rage at, and she too was listening to the radio when the knocking started. Frantic knocking. Eddie pushed past her to dart down the passage the moment the front door came off the latch.

"Don't come sniffing round me, you sod!" She was nearly hysterical from wounded vanity and thwarted greed.

"Listen," Eddie blurted, "you've got to listen!" Disconcertingly he appeared to forget what he meant to say, leaving her staring for a quarter of a minute. Then: "Good lord, the blood and the way he shouted. Any tea in the pot? I'm parched." All in the same crazy rush of breath.

"You've been out with another girl. Saying you love me and all that moody, and you go chasing after the first tart that—"

Emerald clawed at his face and he caught her hands; now, as she wrenched free, their fingers parted with a strange, sticky reluctance that made her gasp and shudder. Her fingers were stained from his grip. She fell silent but could hear her heart.

Eddie sat by the coal fire, radio still babbling from its perch above him. His tone was so quiet the words were hard to catch.

"It was awful, Em. Went all right, first off. Platinum scrap, piece of cake, I'd loaded it all in the van, no trouble. But he would go back. Looking for the float, the petty cash, see. Greedy, stupid-greedy. This old chap, the night watchman, he must have been asleep when we broke in. There wasn't supposed to be a night watchman—we'd checked and checked."

"You've been doing a job," Emerald whispered, not quite believing it, not yet. "Eddie, you've been doing a job."

"Of course I have. Where'd you think I get the money for all your stuff? Where'd you think *he* gets the money?" Eddie jerked his chin sideways. "Doesn't grow on trees. He kept hitting the old bloke. Well, he had to, like. Getting away, the feller held on like a bulldog."

Eddie blinked and lurched out to the kitchen, cupping his palms under the cold tap to drink the best part of a pint of water.

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"Here," he said belatedly, "don't you go talking about this, Em. I had to tell somebody, see. At least I wasn't cheating on you, I was out working. But you mustn't let on."

Emerald, wiping the stained hands on her skirt, proved her true caliber.

"You're having me on. You were out with some tart. I'm not daft, chum."

He shook his head. "Look, I can take you to the place—we'll walk past like we're going home. The law will be there by now, you can see them. I phoned 999. For the old chap, in case he was still—" Eddie's voice broke. "He won't be, he's dead. I tried to help, sat him up—afterwards. It wasn't me, Em, it wasn't me that did it!"

Emerald was considering how to get an answer without unveiling the crucial question. She put her arms around him, still framing the most cunning approach. "Of course it wasn't, darlin', you're not that sort."

Her heart was hammering, her throat had tightened, but she managed to play the ace. "You'll be all right, John Law won't get you. Providing your mate doesn't blab. The bloke with you, the one that mur—that did it. Is he safe, Eddie? Will he let you down?"

Eddie looked blank, even faintly irritated at her stupidity. And he walked into the trap. "Give over, Em. Safe? It was my Dad with me, I always go with my Dad."

An hour later Emerald was at the police station, trying to bargain with Inspector Lochiel for two names. Ninety minutes later Eddie was under arrest.

Along with Dad, his father, George Albert Samuel Minifee.

"It stood to reason—once we knew," says Lochiel. "That cabin cruiser at Teddington cost a small fortune. The bungalow rent was plenty, the car set Minifee back a bundle, to say nothing of running costs. And Minifee was always standing drinks in the pubs during the week. I'd done my sums as best I could. When one added his shop income to what he made as a snout, there was still an interesting amount, like, *outstanding*—to make sense of his spending patterns.

"Personally, I'd fancied him for a receiver—stolen cigarettes, for instance, sold through his shop. I was gently checking Minifee's wholesalers' invoices against his stock when Emerald came to us. He was a burglar, of course, nothing more nor less. The son's en-

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gineering skill helped when they had to crack a lock or do a neat bit of cutting."

Ripples, says Inspector Lochiel. Minifee the informer, planting the idea of a similar trade in Emerald's treacherous mind. Emerald, living nearby, always around the shop, fated to hook Minifee's son. The son so infatuated, so obsessed with soothing her jealousy, that he sees nothing monstrous in using murder as proof of his love. Ripples.

As for the happiness theory. . .

"That worked out as well," Lochiel argues. "Eddie was happy, for all of an hour, convincing Emerald he hadn't been unfaithful to her. And she was happy as a pig in clover, getting two villains to sell to us."

Then he considers the third person, the payer-for-happiness. "The watchman died, right enough. So Minifee hanged. I'm not sure which of them was the third person. A high price for happiness, one way and another."

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Joan Richter

The Waste Pile at Apple Bow

About Steve Jaros, a TV news correspondent, just back from Vietnam, who is assigned to cover a strip-mining disaster in Appalachia—124 people killed and more than 3000 left homeless by a floodslide which the mining company claimed was an "Act of God," and which the miners blamed, not on the rains or the Almighty but on the company's negligence . . . a moving and meaningful story with an unusual theme and background.

"But nothing lives or grows here now—only human beings" . . .

He'd seen the destruction of the land from the air, the hills and hollows of the earth's flesh, scarred and scabbed under a helpless sun. But from the plane window it had been distant and unreal. It wasn't until the TV news correspondent had begun his climb up the steep mountain path, following the old miner, that he began to understand what the big mining interests had done to Appalachia.

By the calendar it was spring, but the only evidence of the land's rebirth was an occasional stalk of fern pushing up a clot of rotting leaves. His eyes smarted from the smoggy haze that hung like gray angel's hair from the branches of the unleafed trees. Steve Jaros licked his lips and felt the grime of coal dust rough under his tongue.

On the path ahead of him he heard the miner cough and he listened to the lingering rattle in the old man's chest. It was the only sound in the stillness besides that of their footfalls on the trail. There were no bird songs, no rustle of squirrels scurrying among the dead leaves. There was no sign of any animal life at all.

The strip mines and the smoldering piles of coal wastes that had been blackening the hills for years were now wrenching the last bit of life from the air and the soil.

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He shifted the strap of his camera on his shoulder and undid the buttons of his suede jacket. Though the air was cold and raw, the exertion of the uphill climb had made him warm. Usually the camera wasn't his to carry, but when he'd learned that the mining company was refusing to talk to newsmen and that the miners were being equally silent, he'd decided to enter Apple Bow with a minimum of fanfare. He had come alone, leaving his cameraman and sound man back at the small hotel in Elkton, on the other side of the mountain.

The decision had one severe drawback. It meant he was limited to using the Filmo, a small camera without sound. Yet, had Charlie and Usher and all their equipment been with him when he'd walked into the schoolhouse now converted into a rescue shelter, he would have met with an even colder wall of reserve. He wouldn't have got any answers at all. He wouldn't be headed now for what was left of the waste pile overlooking the hollow of Apple Bow.

At least that's where he hoped Newt Boyd was taking him. But he wasn't really sure.

For more than half an hour they had been walking in silence, single file, following the steep rutted trail. Ahead of him, gun and game bag slung over his shoulder, the frail old man leaned into the steep incline. Now and again his shoulders shook with a fit of coughing.

When the trail showed signs of leveling off, Newt Boyd stopped and turned around. "Let's set here a minute." He moved off to the side and settled himself on a large boulder.

Across the way Steve leaned back against the trunk of a tree. As he slipped the camera from his shoulder he saw Newt peering at him, faded blue eyes staring intently from under wrinkled, drooping lids. The miner cleared his throat and Steve had the feeling that the pause in the trek up the hillside might have another purpose besides a rest.

"I suppose you heard the company's claiming that floodslide was an 'Act of God.' "

Steve nodded. He'd heard the no-liability position the company had taken and he'd read the terse statement that used just those words—"Act of God."

"They're blaming the rains. Well, rains come every spring. But the company held off until the clouds were hangin' right in there between them hills before they did what they should have done

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months ago. The thunder and lightning was crackling so hard you couldn't hear nothin' on the radio. The rain was coming down in sheets. That's when they tried to blast, hoping to shore things up. But it was too late. There weren't nothin' that could have changed the course of that slide then."

"Are you saying the company *knew* that waste pile at Apple Bow was in danger of collapsing?"

"Sure they knew! Everybody around here knew it was restless. For more than a year we'd been listening to the rumbling and the shifting deep inside that heap, watchin' the water build up behind it, seein' it start to seep through. A survey done last year by some government inspecting team put Apple Bow on the list of piles to be shored up. But the company knew nobody was gonna come around to check, so they did nothin'—until it was too late."

Steve cast a frustrated glance down at the camera on the ground. It would do no good to film Newt Boyd without sound and there was no point in wishing Charlie and Usher were with him now. If only he'd be able to get Newt Boyd to repeat later the things he was saying now . . .

The miner turned sideways and pointed toward a distant spot through the trees. "See off there. There's another pile just like the one at Apple Bow."

Steve's eyes focused on a blackened mount, hooded by a layer of gray cloud. That's what Apple Bow had looked like, before the water had gathered behind it and turned it into a hurtling avalanche of rock and mud and coal waste. One hundred and twenty-four people had been killed and more than 3000 had been left homeless.

"There's hundreds of others of them piles, scattered all over these coal hills, all sitting and waiting until somethin' starts them shifting. Once they start there ain't nothin' that'll stop them."

There was no point in waiting any longer, Steve decided. Now was the time to broach the subject of filming the waste pile at Apple Bow. He could get what he needed with the Filmo. Later he'd try to persuade Newt to talk to him in front of the sound camera that Charlie and Usher had in Elkton.

"How about it, Newt? How close can we get to the pile at Apple Bow?"

The miner was gazing off in the distance, still looking at the other smoldering mound. His head turned slowly.

"You'd have to get mighty close to get any pictures of them bore

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holes where they put the powder when they tried to blast. The company's posted guards to make sure nobody comes snoopin' around. They got guns and orders to shoot anybody trespassing."

Steve knew about the guards, though he hadn't known they were armed. The way he saw it, the company's aggressive silence made it a sure bet they had something to hide. The miners weren't talking because they had something to fear. These suspicions, side by side, aroused not just his interest but his anger.

"There's going to be an official investigation in a few days, Newt. Then the company won't be able to keep anyone away, but I don't want to wait. I want that film now."

"Well, it ain't gonna be easy. Anybody going in there has a good chance of getting his head shot through. This ain't the first time a dam's broke in these parts and it's been the company's fault. It ain't the first time we had to go digging for our dead. There's always some hollerin' right afterwards and politicians make a lot of promises, giving us to believe something's gonna be done. Nothin' ever is. You don't know how powerful these big companies are."

Newt looked away, and against the gray day his profile was sad and lonely. A scraggly beard camouflaged his sunken cheeks, but the loose brown coat did little to hide the dejection and fatigue in the thin rounded shoulders.

Up until then Steve hadn't been able to put his finger on the whole of what was driving him after this story—why, when he had met a wall of silence to his questions, he hadn't simply been satisfied with recounting the details of the disaster and letting it go at that, returning when and if an investigation turned up new information. That was what other correspondents from other networks had done.

But he was incensed by the company's arrogance, its pontifical stand that an "Act of God" had caused the collapse of the waste pile. He bristled at their self-exoneration, while all around him he saw signs of their negligence and their culpability. His eyes swept over the gray-brown woodland, as barren as any he had seen in war zones, and he tried to imagine what it had been like before the mining companies had come, when springtime had meant trees in leaf, a ground cover of wildflowers, and small animals and birds stirring in the brush.

But there was yet another ingredient in the angry mix of his emotions that kept him after the story that lay buried in the rub-

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ble of maimed lives. It was what he saw in Newt Boyd's face now, in the droop of his shoulders and the set of defeat in his bones, what he had seen in all the faces at the rescue shelter, except in the girl's.

He remembered the toss of her blonde head, the resolute set of her chin, and the fiery flash of determination in her deep blue eyes. Even if she were not one of the prettiest young women he'd seen in a long time, she would have stood apart from the others, because of her spirit.

He couldn't rid himself of the feeling that she was responsible for Newt Boyd coming forward, that it was because of her that Newt Boyd was talking to him now.

The old man shifted his position on the boulder and cleared his throat. "There's somethin' you might not know. The company's got a way of drying up a man's living if he's heard complaining. That's one of the reasons them folks at the shelter wasn't saying anything."

"Why are you taking the chance, Newt?"

The old man shrugged. "Fed up. Tired of letting them get away with things. I'm not young any more. My family's grown. I got nothin' to lose."

Steve walked to where the miner was sitting and put his hand on his shoulder. "Newt, the public has been stirred up by what happened here. But people have a way of forgetting things that don't involve them directly. They have to be kept stirred up until the investigation gets started. If there are enough angry people around, demanding answers, the company's negligence and the government's ineffective inspection system won't get swept under the rug this time."

"How're you gonna go about doing that?"

"By keeping the story alive, by showing people what these hills look like, close up, by letting them hear what the miners and their families have to say. To begin with, I want film of Apple Bow."

A light flickered in Newt Boyd's eyes, but in an instant it was gone. "You sure you understand what I've been telling you? Them guards have been hired to watch out for fellas like you. If they catch you spying or trespassing, or whatever you want to call it, they'll shoot, just as if you was a crow sittin' on a fence. And if needs be, afterwards, they'll say that's what they thought you was, a crow."

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"Damn it, Newt, what else are you going to come up with? Are you going to take me there, or do I go alone?" Steve picked up his camera and slung it over his shoulder.

A grin creased through the scraggly beard. There was no mistaking the brightness in the faded blue eyes now. "Lorny said you can't tell a bird while he's all sleeked and strutting. You gotta get him a little ruffled to find out what's under all them feathers. That silk neck thing and that fancy suede jacket you're wearing had me thinkin' you might be all show and no innards. Guess I was wrong. Lorny will be mighty pleased with herself when she finds out."

He got to his feet with a sprightliness Steve hadn't seen before and said, "Let's go."

But Steve put a hand on his arm.

"Who's Lorny?"

"My daughter. Seen you eyeing her at the shelter. Pretty thing she is, but sometimes she's got a mind harder than a hickory nut. She's waiting lunch for us and I expect she's gonna be a bit fussed. We're late."

Steve wasn't about to be sidetracked. "What about filming Apple Bow, Newt?"

"Let's eat first and talk later. Lorny's got a plan."

Steve shook his head, exasperated. At least he'd been right about the girl. His curiosity mounted as he followed Newt back on the trail.

In a few minutes they rounded a bend and he saw a small gray house set back among the trees.

"Needs painting," Newt said. "Lorny was all for starting it this week. Said it would be good therapy, but I've not been of a mind. Since she's come, she's set herself to ironing curtains and washing windows, between helping down at the shelter. Long time ago her brothers and me promised her Ma we'd see she went away to school. Martha didn't want Lorny ending up like all the other women in the hollows, waitin' for their men to come up out of the mines. Lorny's been gone six years, graduated college most two years ago."

"Where does she live?"

"Up north, works in the big city. Came right down when she got the news. She's talking about stayin' on, but this ain't no place for her."

Their voices must have carried into the house because the front

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door swung open and Lorny Boyd appeared in the doorway, blonde head tossing, an impatient hand on a slim jeaned hip.

"I should have known noon would mean closer to two!" A smile softened the reprimand in her blue eyes.

"Now let's not start in scolding, girl. I had a few things on my mind that needed straight'nin' out." He turned to Steve. "This here's my daughter, Lorna. Guess she knows you. Says she's seen you on TV. Can't say I have. Don't have a TV and when I get a chance to see one, don't watch the news. Don't watch them hillbilly programs either. Makes us mountain folk out to be a bunch of dumb jokers."

Lorna Boyd smiled and held out a slim smooth hand. "I thought you were still in Vietnam."

"I got back a couple of weeks ago. This is my first stateside assignment in a long while."

"How does it compare?"

An honest answer would have plunged them into a lengthy and morbid discussion, so he avoided it. "Any place you haven't been before is strange. It helps though when everybody speaks the same language."

"Do we?" There was the unmistakable glint of mischief in her eyes.

He responded with a slow grin as he followed her into the house. "There *have* been moments when I've not been so sure."

In a bathroom down the hall, where fresh white curtains framed a window that faced a hillside of scraggy oaks and pines, Steve splashed some water on his face and pulled a comb through his dark curly hair. For a moment he stared at his reflection, smiling, wondering if "sleeked and strutting" had really been her words, if that's the impression he had made on Lorny Boyd.

Because her speech still held some traces of mountain twang, she presented an interesting mixture of sophistication and hominess. Their brief exchange outside revealed a mind that was quick and pleasantly combative. Her time away from the hills must have changed her a great deal from the girl she had been. He liked the way her eyes sparkled, with a hidden challenge, and the way her yellow knit shirt hugged her gentle curves and fitted tidily into lean beige levis.

When he returned to the kitchen she was at the stove taking a platter of fried chicken from the oven.

She glanced up and smiled. "I hope you're hungry."

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"I didn't realize how much until I stepped in here." He sniffed the air appreciatively.

"Everything's ready and Dad's waiting for you." She nodded toward a round table by the window where Newt was already seated and three places were set.

"How about a mite of whiskey?" Newt offered and reached for a jug on the floor at his side.

"I can't think of anything I'd like more," he said agreeably.

Newt filled two small glasses. "Goes down nice and easy." He handed one to Steve and waited. Steve tipped the glass to his lips, bracing himself. He'd had mountain brew before. But he was pleasantly surprised and nodded his approval.

"Local?"

"Don't drink nothin' else," Newt said, with a grin. "Two's my limit though. Doctor say I shouldn't drink at all account of the cough. But the few extra days it might give me ain't worth it."

Lorny joined them, adding a basket of warm buttered biscuits and a bowl of salad to the chicken that was already on the table.

"How did you manage all this?" Steve asked as she held the platter out to him. "You were still at the shelter when your father and I left."

She glanced quickly across the table and then back at Steve. "There's a short cut. It takes about ten minutes to get here."

Steve raised an eyebrow and looked at Newt.

The miner shrugged. "There was some thinking I had to do. Some questions that needed answering. Takes a while to figure out a man. Ain't sure I got you figured all the way, but I got a pretty good idea. Wanted to give you enough chances to change your mind."

"One more and I might have."

"Don't think so. You're the kind, the harder it gets, the more you want it."

Steve smiled. "Could be."

"But I think it's time we stopped being cagey and got down to business. First off there's somethin' you should know." Newt paused, his gaze lowered, hovering over his plate. Then his head came up. "Four of our kin were killed in that slide at Apple Bow—my two sons and my daughter-in-law and my four-year-old granddaughter. They was having the little girl's birthday party. I should have been there, only I'd been to Elkton to do some buying. Got held up because of the rain."

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Steve drew in a long breath.

"Don't bother trying to say anything. There ain't nothin' anybody can say. But you gotta know from that I got no love for the company. And neither does Lorny. But up until you came along we weren't in agreement as to what to do about it. Right after it happened, before Lorny come down, I near went crazy. I took my gun and I went out looking for somebody to blame. I guess I would have shot the first company man I seen, except I got a bad coughing spell and could no more walk than I could shoot, so I come on home."

Newt looked toward a corner of the kitchen where the rifle and game bag stood. Steve followed his glance and felt frustration boil within him. A great story was unfolding before him. A newspaper reporter listened and went to a typewriter and wrote it down. But without film and a voice to go along with it, the story Newt was telling him was worthless for television.

"Lorny's got different ideas from the rest of us who've never been out of these hills. Mountain folk have always stayed to themselves, not mixing even with each other much. Lorny says we have to change our ways. Doing things alone ain't gonna get us nowhere now. We got to organize, she says."

Across the table, the smooth curves of Lorny's cheeks were touched with pink, and anger had once again crept into the deep blue of her eyes. She looked as she had at the shelter, determined and ready to fight.

She leaned toward Steve and spoke with quiet control. "You saw those people at the shelter today, patiently waiting to find out what was going to happen to them—women who had lost their husbands, miners who'd used their own picks and shovels to dig out their dead children. All of them homeless, victims of big-company negligence and power, grateful when a Red Cross worker gave them a bologna sandwich!"

Her blonde head tossed and her hand reached out and gripped his arm. "They don't know their rights or how to go about finding out what they are. Somebody has to help them! Someone has to show them how!"

Newt's head jerked in his daughter's direction. "Let's not start that again. I didn't send you up north so you could turn right around and come back here. This ain't no place for you, Lorny. Your mother will be crying in her grave."

She eased herself back in her chair and took her hand from

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Steve's arm. She looked at her father. "All right," she said softly. "We won't talk about that now."

"We're not gonna talk about it ever. Now that's settled." Newt banged his empty glass on the table. "Now suppose we get on with explaining your plan."

Lorna Boyd's blue eyes left her father and turned to Steve. "I'll take you to Apple Bow. We'll leave before dusk this afternoon and get there by dark. We'll stay overnight so we can be there at dawn before the guards get up. You should be able to get all the film you want, without their even knowing you've been there. If Dad took you, he'd be sure to get one of his coughing spells."

Steve looked at Newt. The pieces were beginning to fit. Up until now he still hadn't been able to figure out the miner's reticence to take him to Apple Bow. Now he at least had some idea what was behind it.

"She's somethin', ain't she? Worked this all out herself, even before you showed up at the shelter. Claims she knew you were the kind who wouldn't be satisfied without digging into things."

"What do you mean before I showed up at the shelter? How did you know I was coming?"

Lorny's blue eyes sparkled. "The man who tends bar at the hotel in Elkton is my uncle. He overheard you talking with your crew."

Steve shook his head, grinning slightly. "You've got as good a spy system as I've seen anywhere."

Newt chuckled. "I didn't like the sound of this idea at first, but I guess it will work out all right. How's it strike you?"

"So far so good, but Apple Bow isn't enough. I need you on film, Newt, saying the kinds of things you told me on the way up here, about the company knowing the pile was unstable and not doing anything about it until it was too late."

"Lorny said you'd want that. That's why I'm going to Elkton this afternoon and get those two fellas you left waiting there and that big camera."

"Is there anything you two haven't thought of?"

Newt shrugged. "Maybe. I'll get them and their stuff to the other side of Apple Bow, just across from where you're gonna be. Between the lot of you, you should get all the pictures you want. After that's done we can talk."

Steve looked at Lorna. "You the expert on TV equipment in this family?"

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"I took an elective course in radio and TV techniques at college. I knew the camera you have with you now has no sound."

Steve eyed her appreciatively as she rose to clear the dishes from the table and returned with a pot of coffee. He forced his mind to return to the problem of the interviews he wanted. Now more than before it wouldn't be enough to talk only to Newt. Four members of his family had lost their lives in the slide. It would be natural for Newt's objectivity to be questioned. He explained this.

"What will it take to get some of the other miners to talk to me?"

Newt's eyes narrowed and his thin lips pursed. A thoughtful expression came to his face. "After tomorra morning you won't have no trouble. I promise you."

A look of apprehension darkened Lorna's blue eyes. "What are you planning to do?"

"Ain't telling nobody. So there's no use your pesting." Newt pushed his chair back from the table and rose stiffly. "Since it's a long ways to Elkton I'm gonna take a bit of rest. Wake me in an hour if I ain't up by then."

Steve called after him. "You can use the car I left a couple of streets away from the shelter."

Newt grinned. "I wondered if you'd get around to offering or if I'd have to ask—blue Chevy, ain't it, parked just a few yards from the post office?"

Steve shook his head as the miner walked down the hall to his bedroom. Then he turned to Lorna, "I have to hand it to you two. You sure have led me up a mountain path."

But this time her responding smile was only fleeting, overpowered by the concern in her eyes. "What do you suppose he's up to?"

"You're asking me?"

While Newt slept, Lorna Boyd drew a sketch of the area around the Apple Bow waste pile, showing Steve where she planned to take him; she also mapped out the approach his camera crew would follow on the other side.

"I find it hard to believe if we got that far without being stopped, the three of us couldn't just walk up to that pile and start filming. Those guards can't shoot all three of us and say we were crows sitting on a fence."

"I do believe we are beginning to speak the same language." The sparkle was back in her eyes. "No, I don't thing they'd shoot

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the three of you. But they wouldn't let you film either. So what would that accomplish? The only way to do it is without their knowing."

She leaned toward him. "Steve, do you understand what this will mean to the miners? It will show them that the company can be challenged. Maybe their knowing that will be enough to convince them they should talk to you."

Her face brightened. "I bet that's what my father plans to do—take a few men along with him and let them see for themselves. You know people here don't know there's a difference between TV newsmen and the men who put on those awful hillbilly programs. My father didn't. It took a lot of talking to convince him. He didn't trust you. Why should they?"

Steve shook his head. "You're right. Why should they? Why do you?"

She wrinkled her nose at him. "I've been out in the big wide world. Besides, I need you to help me get things started here. My father doesn't like the idea of my coming back. I'm not really sure I want to. But sometimes I think it's the only right thing. To leave here and get an education and not come back and help out—"

"And here I've been hoping to see you in New York."

"That would be nice." She smiled wistfully. "It isn't easy to decide."

"None of the big ones are."

While she did the dishes, he wrote a note to Charlie and Usher, explaining what the plan was, enclosing the map she had made of the area surrounding Apple Bow.

Newt had been asleep almost an hour when the sound of coughing came from his room, deep and strangled. Lorna started down the hall, but stopped outside his door. In a while she came back to the kitchen.

"He's lived with it for so long now. But someday—" She left the sentence unfinished.

In a few minutes Newt joined them. "You got things ready for tonight, Lorny?"

She opened the door of a cupboard and took out three bulging pillowcases. "Blankets, food, and something to drink." She reached up to a hanger and handed Steve a heavy woolen sweater and a worn leather jacket.

"It will be cold tonight. What you're wearing won't be warm

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enough and besides you don't exactly melt into the landscape."

He grinned. "I'll have you know I bought this jacket in Spain and the scarf came all the way from Bangkok."

"You don't say? Well, peacocks never were a part of these woods, and if they were, they'd be mighty scarce by now. So you'd better change your feathers or those guards will shoot you for the wrong reasons."

Steve threw his head back and laughed. Then, with a deliberate glance that ticked off her yellow knit shirt and the trim levis, he asked, "And what are you going to wear?"

"You won't recognize me when I've changed."

"You want to bet?"

Newt cleared his throat. "Listen, you two, this ain't no picnic you're going on. Don't go getting carried away with that kind of nonsense."

"What nonsense?" she asked, the color in her cheeks deepening.

"Listen here, girl, I'm not dead yet and besides my memory is pretty good. I can see it's a waste of time saying anything else, so I'd best just be on my way." He thrust out a bony, callused hand at Steve. "Maybe when this is all over you can do somethin' about them hillbilly programs. Keep an eye on her. She thinks she knows it all, but she don't."

Lorna kissed her father's cheek. "I'd forgotten how ornery you can be."

Newt started toward the door, then stopped, walked back across the room and hoisted his rifle and game bag over his shoulder.

Lorny's hand reached out. "Pa." In the one word her voice was a frightened child's whisper.

Newt patted her hand. "Don't go frettin' none. I've lived a long time and I know what I'm doing."

In the middle of the night Steve woke to a thick blackness all around him. There were no stars to be seen, only the dim shadows of the moon, hidden by a heavy layer of clouds.

Beside him Lorna Boyd stirred and he felt her breath sweep past his cheek, the soft silk of her hair brush his ear.

He lay still, waiting for the horizon of the dark night to become fringed with the glow of a coming dawn.

Before they'd left the house she had taken him around to the back where the spikes of crocus leaves had struggled up through the sour earth, the last of a garden her mother had planted years

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ago. Lorny had pointed out the roof of the schoolhouse below and the winding path of the short cut.

"When I was a little girl there used to be bushels of violets to pick in the spring. My brother used to go hunting for raccoon and squirrel and wildcat. One summer a flock of bluebirds flew into that tree over there. But nothing lives or grows here now—only human beings."

Her face had been turned away from him, her thoughts involved in a private memory. He remembered thinking how lovely she was, even in the baggy dark gray coat that belonged to her father. In another time, in another woods, he would have turned her toward him and taken her in his arms and kissed her. But instead he reached for a stick and broke it in two.

Dawn now hovered below the horizon of the sky. He woke her and they untangled themselves from the coverings and rose, stretching cramped limbs. She poured coffee from a Thermos.

They were on the downward slope of the hillside, overlooking the high and the hollow of Apple Bow. As dawn lifted and the spread of light fanned upward into the sky, an ugly black sprawling shadow took shape in the shallow valley not far below, the dregs of the waste pile.

Steve began to film in regular intervals following the progression of dawn into day. While his eye was to the camera, a sudden beam of brilliant sunlight pierced the layers of cloud cover and with the accuracy of an arrow finding its mark it illuminated a string of bore holes at the base of the collapsed waste pile.

Beside him, Lorny touched his arm and pointed, exclaiming softly. He nodded and swept the area with the camera.

He lowered it and turned to her. "Look over there," he said softly, pointing to the opposite hillside. "Did you see that?" There was a sudden brief glint of light, there one instant, then gone, then repeated, with no set pattern.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Sun glancing off a camera lens. Your father got to Elkton. Charlie and Usher are where he said they would be." He wondered if Newt was with them. "Where are the guards?"

She held onto his arm and leaned forward, pointing to a spot just below them, still in partial shadow, not yet discovered by the sun. He could make out the shape of a lean-to.

He changed the film in the camera and put the reel he'd shot into a weatherproof bag.

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"You stay here. I want to get a closer look," he said.

Her blue eyes defied him and he knew there was neither time nor point to argument. Newt had warned him she was strong-willed.

The ground was soft from the recent rains and any leaves left from previous years were damp and made no sound underfoot. The greatest hazard was the possibility of slipping, but there was enough low growth for them to catch onto, as they made their slow descent.

Suddenly the murmur of voices reached them and they stopped. Three figures emerged from the lean-to, burly men in heavy woolen coats. One had a shotgun, held lightly in his hand, the other two carried rifles. Steve raised the Filmo to his eye and followed the men as they fanned out into a semicircle and walked to a midpoint in the hollow.

As the three men spread out, Steve could see that their heads were raised, their eyes scanning the encircling hillside. For a moment he felt a pair of eyes looking directly at him, but they slid away without acknowledgement.

Across the way the glint of sunlight came and went again. The man with the shotgun called out and one of his partners lifted a pair of binoculars hanging from a strap around his neck and trained them on the hillside across the way.

Beside him Lorny's fingers grabbed and bit into his arm. But the camera was up to his face and he would not be distracted. The man with the binoculars let them fall to his chest and was bringing his rifle up to his shoulder.

"Steve!" Her voice beside him was an imperative hoarse cry. His eyes flashed toward her for an instant and he saw her face chalk-white against the dark gray of her father's wool coat.

But Lorny was not looking at the man with the rifle. Her face was turned sideward, eyes wide with terror, focused on the small bent figure coming up from the mouth of the hollow.

Steve watched as Newt Boyd picked his way amid the rubble of the wash, heading in a straight line for the three armed guards.

Across the way a sparkle of light glinted against the brown hillside. The guard's rifle was raised and aimed.

"Hey, what you fellas shooting at?" Newt's voice rang out clear as a shot in the hollow.

Three guns swung and fired. Newt Boyd staggered and fell still to the ground.

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Over Lorny's agonized moan Steve heard the sound of gunfire coming from the woods below. A shower of black earth sprang up and spattered around the feet of the guards. Guns fell from their hands and their arms reached into the air.

A small band of miners started out of the woods, moving slowly across the blackened earth of the hollow.

Lorny buried her face against Steve's chest. He took her in his arms and laid his cheek against her hair.

On the opposite hillside came the familiar glint of sun off the camera's lens. Charlie and Usher were there, with sound and film. Steve was sure they had got it all.

Slowly she lifted her head and he looked into her upturned face, into blue eyes blurred by tears, filled with sorrow and uncertainty.

His voice was husky in his throat when he spoke, and his eyes stung. "Your father didn't plan it this way, but he knew it could happen and he took the chance."

She nodded quickly, biting her lower lip. Then she reached for his hand and in a while they started down into the hollow together.

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Michael Harrison

The Jewel of Childeric

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

It is years since we've given you a "new adventure in ratiocination" of the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, the great-great-grandfather of fictional detectives. Here, for your pleasure, is the newest pastiche of Edgar Allan Poe's noble and enduring experiment in literature—a tale offering a time-honored gambit, a time-honored bafflement, with the great Dupin coming up with a new solution, new for 1877 and new for 1977 . . .

Detective: "C. AUGUSTE DUPIN"

Never, not even in the days of my greatest misfortune and unhappiness, had I been so perilously close to despair.

That my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, trusted confidant not only of the Prefect of the Parisian police but of the crowned heads of Europe and even of some of the most respected administrators of my own infant Republic, that this noble man whom I had learned to revere, that he should have been accused, in his own house, of common theft—

I have before me, as I write, an open scrap-book to whose pages have been affixed extracts from those newspapers which had been supplied, through the malice of his accusers, the material of calumny even before the events had occurred. But let me tell of this most alarming of all our adventures in an orderly fashion. Let me begin at the beginning.

On one balmy summer's evening, not long after the last of the senior Bourbons had made his way secretly and in haste from Paris, and the mob had exhibited its fervent *patriotisme* by sacking the royal apartments at St. Cloud, my friend was standing by an open window of our little back library or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33, Rue Dunô, Faubourg St. Germain.

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"Peste!" he exclaimed, taking the meerschaum pipe from his mouth. "We have a visitor—and this fine evening I would gladly have dispensed with such diversion as the most charming visitor might bring." For though the windows of our little back library did not overlook the coachyard, we might, nevertheless, hear any vehicle which entered the yard.

A few minutes later the door opened and our domestic, Hyacinthe, advanced into the room with a bow. A letter, sealed with a great disk of purple wax, rugose with extravagant armorial bearings, was in his hand.

"A message from Madame la Baronne de F—s, for the perusal of Monsieur le Chevalier Dupin."

My friend broke the seal, and scanned the few lines written on lace-edged paper.

"Pray show Madame la Baronne into the *salon,* where we shall join her. Serve the customary refreshments, Hyacinthe."

As the door closed behind our domestic, I exclaimed, "But, Dupin, this is the person against whom—"

"I collected evidence—the evidence used in the action brought against her by Prince Louis de R—n. I wonder what errand brings her here?"

Madame was awaiting us in the *salon.* Dupin bowed and expressed those formal sentiments that common courtesy demands, even when we are with our enemies. Madame la Baronne bowed and responded in kind. Dupin then asked her permission to present me—a permission graciously extended by this lady of humble English origins, whose ambitions and behavior bade fair to rock the new Kingdom before it had fairly settled down to show the world what liberal monarchy could do for the people of France.

After Hyacinthe had handed around the wine and *patisseries,* and the door had closed behind the domestic, Madame de F—s observed, with a coyness which accorded ill with her flashing eye and domineering manner, "Perhaps, Monsieur le Chevalier, you are anxious to know what has induced me to call on one who has not, so far, shown himself my most chivalrous supporter? Well, first of all, let me urge you not to fear that I entertain any resentment toward you for the construction you put on the tragic events at the Château de L—. I understand that the honesty for which you are justly renowned would necessarily have counselled you to spare no feelings, so long as you demonstrated the truth *as you perceived it."*

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I thought that I saw the ghost of a smile on Dupin's lips as he noted the emphasis that the Baroness placed on the last four words.

"Did you know, Monsieur," Madame de F—s continued, "that his Majesty, for whose son I have done so much—secured him, in the face of all the odium inspired against me, the reversion of the greatest estate in France—you know, Monsieur, that it was I, and I alone, who did this for the King's son?"

"Yes, Madame, I know it."

"Well, then, you may or may not know that the King, having gained this priceless heritage for his son, has now turned against me."

"I heard something of the matter."

"And so his Majesty has refused to permit me to carry out the one request that his late Royal Highness—my great friend, as you know—asked me to discharge in person: the conversion of the Château de G— into an asylum for the men who fought in Condé's army. This, I learn, his Majesty forbids on the insupportable grounds that the establishment of such an asylum for maimed or pauper soldiers who fought for the Crown of France would ill accord with the liberal sentiments of the July Monarchy, and might—*might,* observe, Monsieur le Chevalier!—incite the mob to new acts of subversion and violence."

"But what, Madame, with respect, has all this to do with me?"

"This, Monsieur," the lady answered, turning upon both of us the full force of her *mesmeric* regard. "I wish to soften the King's heart with a gift of such value, of such importance, that he will no longer be able to refuse me permission to carry out the late Duke's request. And the gift that I wish to acquire—to purchase for presentation to the King—will soon be in *your* hands, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"In mine, Madame?" my friend cried.

"In yours, Monsieur. You, Monsieur Dupin, will soon be in possession of one of the great treasures of ancient France, lost since the Revolution of '89, and just recovered in London."

"Madame, you amaze me! *I* shall soon be in possession of this treasure? Why, who will be so generous as to give it to me?"

"An acquaintance of mine, whose family fled from Paris to London in the Terror. He is even now on his way to see you. His arrangements provided for his departure from Dover, by the packet, this morning. He will take the light English coach to Paris at ten

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to-morrow morning, and he will, all being well, arrive at the Hotel Messe-Meurice, Rue de la Prison, at six P.M. on the following day."

"I see. To-day is Monday. I ought, then, to expect him on Wednesday evening or Thursday morning. Is it permitted to inquire which treasure this gentleman is bringing me?"

From her reticule the Baroness drew out one of those leather *porte-monnaies* which open in the manner of a book. From an inner receptacle of this purse the lady removed what were evidently pieces cut from English newspapers. These she handed to my friend, who began to read them.

Summarized, the several extracts, some more detailed than others, told how a French citizen, son of *émigrés* parents, and himself well-established as a merchant in London, had come to the decision to restore to France the famed *chef d'oeuvre* of Merovingian times, the so-called Jewel of Childeric. This was a portrait of King Childeric, engraved, in intaglio, on the back of a disk of rock-crystal.

The French merchant, Monsieur Souvigny (the newspapers' report continued), explained that the Jewel had formerly been in the possession of the late father of the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, to whose son Monsieur Jean-Jacques Souvigny was now proposing to return it.

"I see," said my friend, handing back the pieces of newspaper to the Baroness: "I see now why you visited me, Madame—to inform me of Monsieur Souvigny's intention to make restoration—"

"Say rather *restitution,* Monsieur. Monsieur Souvigny's father stole it from yours."

"Just so."

"Do you not remember the Jewel, Monsieur? I know that, in '94, you were but a child—"

"Madame, I was too young to notice, let alone interest myself in, Merovingian *objets d'art.* No, I have no recollection of this antiquity.

"So, Madame," said Dupin thoughtfully, "this is the treasure which you are asking me to hand over to you so that you, in turn, may give it to his Majesty?"

"Yes. In order that I may make his Majesty a gift of such value that he will have the courage to reject the advice of his timid Ministers, and permit me to fulfill the ambition that the late Duke had when he entrusted me with the task of founding—as

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Madame de Maintenon did a century ago—a home for deserving old soldiers. Now, Monsieur, that is my ambition. A worthy one, is it not?"

"No one," Dupin observed prudently, "might, in all justice, find fault with the founding of an asylum for decayed old soldiers."

After Madame la Baronne de F——s had driven from the courtyard of our house in that splendid equipage which had been only one of the least valuable of the late Duke's gifts, Dupin said, "Let us go back to our little book-closet, where I may smoke some Latakia and meditate on this remarkable woman and her even more remarkable story."

As we walked up the broad old staircase of Henry II's time, and came to a large glass-fronted bookcase which stood on the landing outside our favorite room, Dupin paused to examine the books. Hidden away in one of the darkest corners of the bookcase were a dozen or so tall, thick volumes bound in the finest scarlet morocco, with gilt lettering on the spines.

"Pray be so good," my friend requested, "as to take out those tall red volumes, while I hold up the lamp."

I did so, and together we carried the heavy tomes into our little book-closet, depositing them on a table between the two windows.

"On the face of it—on the face of it—" Dupin murmured, sinking into his fauteuil, and drawing toward him his pewter tobacco-jar, "the tale that we have heard to-day has elements of the most unchallengeable plausibility. Yet, though one would be foolish to deny that coincidences are encountered as much in actual life as in the romances of Mr. Matthew Gregory Lewis or Mrs. Ann Radcliffe or the *Reverend* Maturin, they should—in actual life—be accepted with a great deal more reserve than when we encounter them in novels."

"Your remarks, my dear friend, are à propos of—what?"

"Of the fact," he said, lighting his pipe with a match ignited from the small spirit-lamp on his sofa-table, "of the fact that this is the *second* time that a mediaeval jewel has turned up in our experience, and that, in both cases, the voluble and not inexperienced lady who has just left us has been involved. Do you not remember the case of the wretched Monsieur de St. Dizier, killed by his scapegrace nephew? Of course!

"Do you not also remember that this person was foully done to death so that the murderer might secure possession of another

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mediaeval antiquity, the so-called Jewel of Lothaire, part of the ancient Regalia of France—and a priceless treasure that, we had reason to believe, had been pawned with Monsieur de St. Dizier by the Baronne de F——s herself?"

"I recall these matters perfectly, now that you have brought them back to memory."

"Just so. And I ask myself this question: whence, in *reality,* did this so-called Jewel of Childeric originate?

"However, let us determine one fact. Let us see whether or not the famed Jewel of Childeric was ever in the possession of my family. Yes," he added, indicating the volumes that we had taken from the bookcase, "these tomes represent the detailed inventory of our houses both in Paris and Saumur. They are all that is left of either. The volumes escaped because, at the time of the sackings, they were lodged with an attorney. Come," he said, the evidence of his deep agitation apparent in his gruffy voice and sharp manner, "let us begin our search."

The dawn had broken when, with a sigh, I closed the last volume and shook my head.

"I should have been deeply astonished," said Dupin, with an air of what seemed nothing at all like disappointment, "had you or I found anything.

"Now I *wonder* what Monsieur Souvigny wants of me? I confess that I am looking forward with no little eagerness to a sight of this valuable relic of France's Merovingian past. But what *excessive* generosity to offer it to *me,* whose family never possessed it in the first place!

"And next in order of importance to the Jewel of Childeric—though not so *very* far behind!—I am all anxiety to see this Monsieur Souvigny.

"Well, it has been a day full of interest. Let us now go to bed, while I compose myself to await, with what patience I may command, the arrival of this noble-hearted *émigré* on Wednesday night or Thursday morning. And we must not forget to invite G—— to be one of those to welcome Monsieur Souvigny."

A commissionaire brought us a note on Wednesday evening to inform us that, the light English coach having arrived in the Rue de la Prison three hours late, Monsieur Souvigny would have the honor of calling on us at half-past ten on Thursday morning. My friend and I were standing, not by an open window of our little

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book-closet, but of a room which overlooked the courtyard. When the first of the coaches to arrive rolled over the cobbles to the *porte-cochère,* it contained G——, invited by Dupin to be present twenty minutes before Monsieur Souvigny was due to arrive. Hyacinthe had been instructed to bring the Prefect of the Parisian police to this open window on the third floor, for reasons that Dupin did not condescend to explain, though there was certain other information of which my friend put G—— in possession.

"Ah!" said G., looking out of the window, as another coach came into the courtyard, "that is my friend from the Archives Nationales—he is enthusiasm itself to see this priceless relic of France's very beginnings! You have no objection to my having invited him?"

"Indeed not," said Dupin, as we watched an old shabby fiacre, drawn by a bony nag, discharge a lank, shabby, schoolmaster-like man who proceeded to haggle with the *cocher* over a couple of sous. "I have a presentiment that when Monsieur Souvigny arrives, he, too, will not be unaccompanied."

And so, in fact, it proved. Monsieur Souvigny not only arrived in the company of Madame la Baronne, but arrived in her splendid equipage, doing himself the honor of handing her out.

My friend and I received the last of our guests in our *salon,* but not before, in casting a final glance out of the window overlooking the carriage-yard, we had the opportunity of seeing how exceedingly close to the surface was Monsieur Souvigny's decided irritability, not to say his nervousness. For, after having handed out the Baroness, he began to walk, the lady's fingers on his arm, toward the *porte-cochère* of our old mansion. As he did so, he passed inadvertently close to the lady's superb matched bays.

His head inclined courteously to attend to his fair companion's conversation, Monsieur Souvigny did not see the horse that he almost brushed in passing. The quadruped, taking advantage of Monsieur Souvigny's preoccupation, began to nuzzle his coat-pocket. In the clear morning air the distinguished *émigré*'s blow on the animal's muzzle sounded distinctly, and so, indeed, did Monsieur Souvigny's angry words, spoken in English: "To the D—— with you, you brute!"

We saw that Monsieur Souvigny made some apologetic observation, *à propos* of his angry outburst, to the Baroness; but she merely shrugged, and indicated that they should continue.

It was a disagreeable incident to see, but, later, Dupin, who

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turned away from the window with a smile on his lips, was to remind me that it had been a significant occurrence as well.

Monsieur Souvigny did not disappoint us. True to Dupin's prognostications, our visitor began by asking our permission to invite Madame de F——s to the meeting, since, as he explained, "Madame la Baronne hopes to become even more intimately associated with the affair, as indeed, so I am informed, Madame has already apprised you, Monsieur le Chevalier."

Dupin bowed and expressed his satisfaction that the Baroness had been able to join us. I could see that my friend was subjecting Monsieur Souvigny to a close but not openly noticeable examination. The man was about thirty-five, and though dressed in the latest English mode, his clothes not only seemed all too new but of a costly kind to which he appeared not to be accustomed. The English have a word for the type of man who would ape the appearance of, while failing to ape the manner of, a man of breeding. The English call such a man a "gent." Monsieur Souvigny impressed me as being a "gent."

Not, I must record, that he appeared to be ill-at-ease. To the contrary. He showed no signs of embarrassment when, at the invitation of my friend, the Chevalier, he repeated and embellished the tale that we had already perused in the extracts from the English newssheets. The only additional—and highly significant—detail to come forth from Monsieur Souvigny's own narrative was that the Jewel had not been *stolen* by his late father, as the English sheets had mistakenly reported, but *saved*. The late Monsieur Souvigny, passing the Hôtel Dupin in March, 1794, had been caught up in the Vandal mob, swept, willy-nilly, into the house, and had there snatched up the Jewel, lying among some other curiosities scattered when a glass-topped table had been overturned.

"My revered father," Monsieur Souvigny explained, "had but one thought—to save something for the unhappy family whose domestic treasures he saw being plundered and pillaged by the mob."

"But," interjected G——, in no very courteous tone of voice, "all this happened nearly forty years ago! Your late father never returned the Jewel, and you yourself—it seems to me that you Souvignys have certainly taken your time in making a simple act of restitution!"

But for that, too, Monsieur Souvigny had a ready explanation.

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It seems that Souvigny *père* had intended to return it many years since, but, after he had left France, he had been troubled to read that the Dupin family had demonstrated what, for him, were disagreeable symptoms of liberal sentiment—and he had not troubled to return the Jewel.

"And you, Monsieur?" G——asked.

"I have rid myself of my late father's prejudices, but I have a prejudice of my own that I regret to have to mention here. It is true that my father always regarded the Jewel as having been the property of the Dupin family, but I have since come to the conclusion that this relic of ancient France, which must have come from the Regalia of France, can never legally have belonged to your late father, and therefore belongs to the Kingdom of France."

Dupin smiled.

"We may have less to argue on in that respect than you appear to believe, Monsieur. But, while we leave the consideration of ownership aside for a moment, may we not see this famous Jewel of Childeric?"

The Jewel was in a worn morocco case, about the size made to hold pocket-watches—watches of the newer, smaller type, and not those big, old-fashioned timepieces known vulgarly as "turnips." It was a disk of rock-crystal, from which the original gold edge had been rudely torn—perhaps by the revolutionists. The figure of the King, with a legend in dog-Latin around the periphery of the disk, was in that stiff-legged mediaeval posture with which the recent exhibition of Merovingian art has made so many of us familiar. Monsieur Delaporte, the gentleman from the Archives Nationales, expressed his fervent hope that—to whomever the Jewel might rightfully belong—it would eventually find an honored place in his museum.

As the Jewel passed from hand to hand, I observed that Monsieur Souvigny appeared to be deeply occupied with the small spring-catch which fastened the morocco case.

"Peste!" he exclaimed. "I must take this to an artisan, and let him repair it, so that it closes the box." As he spoke thus, Monsieur Delaporte handed back the Jewel, but, with a preoccupied look, Monsieur Souvigny merely accepted the Jewel from the antiquary, and laid it down on the table by his coffee-cup, from which, I recall, he had drunk very little.

"Well," he said, after having poked and prodded the tongue of the brass catch, "I suppose that it will serve until I can buy a new

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box." He pulled a huge, old-fashioned timepiece—a veritable "turnip"—from his fob-pocket, and with a glance at the *ormoulu* clock on the mantelshelf, rose and walked over to the fire-place, so as to set his watch by the time shown on our clock. "Perhaps, Monsieur le Préfet, you would be so good as to obtain the opinion of some eminent Law Officer of the Crown as to the rightful ownership of this antiquity? Excellent! Now, gentlemen, as I have promised to accompany the Baroness back to her hotel, I must ask you to excuse me. I shall," he said, returning the "turnip" to his pocket, "now replace the Jewel in its box, and have the honor to bid you *au revoir.*"

He walked over to the table on which he had laid down the Jewel and—

"*Mille tonnerres!*" he shouted. "Where is the Jewel?"

Let me spare the reader the painful scenes which followed, in which both Monsieur Souvigny and his titled friend retrogressed, as the zoologists say, to their plainly humble origins. They shouted, they stamped, they screamed. The uncouth cries were distinguished by two very clearly heard phrases: "a den of thieves" and "blatant robbery of the French people."

I pass over, too, the searching of room and persons to which both G—— and Dupin—— the latter with a cynical smile that he made no attempt to hide—willingly submitted. Hyacinthe, summoned by bell, was sent to fetch Sergeant Fournier, G—'s factotum, from the coach in the courtyard, and Fournier was sent off by G. to the Rue de Jerusalem, to fetch two male and one female searchers—the female to examine the person of the Baroness, who had been the first to demand "proof of innocence."

The searches were made with care. Nothing was found, neither on the persons searched nor in the *salon*. The Jewel had disappeared. Monsieur Souvigny left the house abruptly, vowing vengeance against "the thieves," and promising to lay all "the information" before the editors of the most irresponsible newssheets in Paris.

"The villain!" I exclaimed, when we were at last alone. "Why, Dupin, did you not permit me to chastise him as he so richly deserved?"

Dupin smiled.

"The others would have interfered. Besides," he added, filling his meerschaum pipe with the rich Latakia to which he was ever

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faithful, "I did not wish to endanger the Jewel of Childeric in any way. A tussle *might* have injured it."

"But," I exclaimed, "how could I have damaged the Jewel in chastising this insufferable fellow?"

"Because it was in his pocket," said my friend, puffing away at his pipe, and hiding himself, as was his wont, within a thick cloud of fragrant smoke. "Oh yes, indeed. Why, you did not suppose for a moment that it had been lost? Oh no, nothing of the sort."

"But this Souvigny was searched."

"Yes. He hid it well, to conceal it from G——'s perceptive searchers."

"Are you certain?"

"I am positive."

"How can you be so positive it was on Souvigny's person?"

"Because it was not on the person of any of the others—ourselves included, of course. Nor was it dropped, to hide itself accidentally in the room. *Ergo,* it was concealed on the person of Monsieur Souvigny."

"Then why, Dupin, in Heaven's name, did you not denounce him?"

My friend smiled again.

"For two reasons. The first, as I told you, that I do not wish to expose the Jewel to damage in any way. The second, that I wish to expose an infernal plot to discredit me. I have solved the mystery; I shall summon both the plotters once more to meet me here; and now I propose to take the air. I would rather you refrained from offering to accompany me. I have two things to commission. When G——, Madame la Baronne, and her friend—as well, of course, as Monsieur Delaporte—arrive again within a day or two, I shall explain everything."

"But the newssheets! The scandal!"

Dupin shrugged. "They will simply have to eat their words, that is all. I have endured scandal before this, my friend."

Dupin had warned me not to start the mantel-shelf clock, that he had, he told me, purposely stopped. Apart from this, though, I was as ignorant of his thoughts and actions and ratiocinations as were the visitors, with us at the invitation of G——, who took their seats as Hyacinthe handed around coffee.

"I requested that Monsieur le Préfet assemble you here to-day," Dupin explained, "because I have some excellent news—especially

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for Monsieur Souvigny. The Jewel has been found. What, Monsieur Souvigny, did not Monsieur G——so inform you? *Tiens!* What an oversight on his part! But you seem thunderstruck, Monsieur Souvigny; are you not gratified?"

"Yes—yes—I suppose so," said Monsieur Souvigny, now as white as though he had seen a ghost. "But it is such a shock—of relief, of course—that I hardly know what to say. Where—where was it found, Monsieur?"

"Oh, it had rolled under the carpet. You must have dropped it, Monsieur Souvigny. Now, Monsieur Delaporte, inform us please: that engraving on rock-crystal that Monsieur Souvigny showed us a couple of days ago—would you affirm, from your experience as an antiquary, that this was a veritable work of art from the time of the Merovingian kings?"

"Indeed, I would stake my reputation, both as an antiquary and as a senior officer of the Archives Nationales, on it."

"Good. I regret that it was mislaid the other day. I recall that Monsieur Souvigny put it down on the table, by his coffee-cup, because he was, at that moment, trying to repair the catch of the box in which he had brought the Jewel. Is that not so, Monsieur Souvigny?"

"Yes, perfectly true," said the man, through lips which were now deadly pale. "But, Monsieur le Chevalier, pardon me, but have you *truly* found the Jewel?"

"Of course," said my friend, with a *nonchalant* air, taking the missing Jewel from his pocket, and laying it down on the table beside a cup of steaming coffee.

Monsieur Souvigny half rose from his chair, but, with a gesture of undeniable authority, Dupin waved him back.

"Patience! You shall all examine it in a moment. In the meanwhile—" He glanced at the mantel-clock and made a sound of annoyance. "*Peste!* That stupid Hyacinthe has forgotten to wind the clock! Have you the right time, Monsieur Souvigny? I know that you carry a watch."

The man pulled his vast "turnip" out of his fob-pocket and —Dupin snatched it from his grasp, pushing the watch's owner back into his chair with no little force. Monsieur Souvigny collapsed into the fauteuil, and stared at my friend with horrified eyes.

Dupin retreated to the fireplace, from which he might address the whole company.

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"Now, Madame la Baronne and gentlemen, the time has come for explanations. I shall now tell you how I came to be accused of common theft. You have all seen the Parisian newspapers this morning, retailing information supplied by Madame de F——s and her accomplice? No, Madame, your indignation will neither move me nor silence me. Be quiet, pray!"

Dupin picked up the disk that he had laid on the table by his coffee-cup, and held the disk high, so that all might see it.

"Now, you all observe the Jewel of Childeric? How very *outré!*" he laughed; "for, Madame and gentlemen, *you see nothing of the sort.*"

"You mean, sir, that the Jewel of Childeric is *not* a genuine work of Merovingian times?" Monsieur Delaporte cried. "But I—"

"The Jewel, sir, *is* genuine. But *this* is not the Jewel. It is an imitation, made for me by an engraver in the Rue Mazarine. It will not pass close inspection, but, at a distance, it is sufficiently like the real Jewel to be mistaken for it—as indeed, you all, with the sole exception of Monsieur Souvigny, mistook it the other day.

"Let me refresh your memories. Monsieur Delaporte gave the genuine Jewel back to Monsieur Souvigny, then apparently occupied with repairs to the Jewel's case. You all *believed* that you saw him—since he was so busy with the leather case—place the Jewel on the table there, beside a cup of coffee.

"Madame, gentlemen, *he did no such thing.* Monsieur Souvigny put the *real* Jewel in his pocket; what he laid so openly on the table by the coffee-cup was what I have here—a disk of pure, almost completely transparent *confectioner's candy,* skillfully engraved, by a competent gem-cutter, from a design which I supplied—I obtained the design from a book on Merovingian antiquities that I purchased in the Passage St. Germain the other day. The candy, you observe, is as clear as glass—or, shall we not rather say, as rock-crystal?

"Now let us see to which point we have come. Let us reconstruct, as the police say, the events of three days ago.

"Monsieur Souvigny deftly substituted, for the real Jewel that Monsieur Delaporte handed to him, a sugar disk similar to the one now lying on the table. But, by the rules of this plot to discredit and disgrace me, the spurious disk must now be made to disappear."

"But how, Dupin?" I asked.

"Be patient, my dear friend! I shall soon show you. One per-

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ceives, by his skillful palming of the real Jewel, and his ready substitution of the false one, that Monsieur Souvigny is no stranger to the arts of prestidigitation—and when the English detective police shall have answered the request for Monsieur Souvigny's *dossier,* we shall almost certainly discover something to his discredit not unconnected with sleight-of-hand. But to continue.

"This necessary disappearance of the false Jewel called, however, for no whisking of the disk into a sleeve or secret pocket. Indeed no—but let me show you." And here Dupin picked up the disk of sugar, *and dropped it into his coffee!* "It rather oversweetens the coffee, I should say," he added, in a conversational tone of voice. "But it is certain that the disk has now entirely disappeared."

"Then where, in Heaven's name, is the *real* Jewel?" G——cried.

"Why, my dear Prefect, where else should it be but—here?—and Dupin, smiling, held up Monsieur Souvigny's old-fashioned "turnip" pocketwatch, swinging it idly by its plaited horse-hair guard. "A certain amount of alteration has been made in the case of this timepiece, but the English watchmakers are known to be adept in these matters. We open it—ah, so! and behind the movement, within the back—yes, here is a cleverly concealed catch—we find a silk-lined receptacle. And, yes, here is the *real* Jewel of Childeric, that I now propose to hand over for safe-keeping to Monsieur Delaporte. Well, Monsieur Souvigny?"

The man shrugged, but remained silent.

"But *when*," G—— asked, "did Monsieur Souvigny place the real Jewel in the secret compartment of his pocket timepiece?"

"Why," Dupin answered, "when he set his watch by the mantel-shelf clock. Do you not remember?"

"Of course!"

"And it was because he had somewhat called our attention to the big, old-fashioned timepiece, that its *unusual* size aroused no suspicion in the minds of the searchers, so that, though I am positive that they opened the back, they found nothing—for they were not seeking anything *in* the watch.

"The motive, of course, is patent: revenge. I gathered and supplied evidence against Madame la Baronne in the action brought against her by Monseigneur le Prince Louis de R——n. Somewhere, she recruited this quite dexterous accomplice. The argument that I *might* have stooped to common theft was supplied

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in Monsieur Souvigny's statement that he had decided, after all, *not* to return the Jewel to me—though, as Monsieur G—— knows, the Jewel never belonged to my father or to any other member of my family."

Monsieur Souvigny gave a coarse laugh.

"At least, Monsieur le Chevalier, you must admit that it was a good attempt, even though it did not quite succeed?"

Dupin shook his head. He said contemptuously, "You deceive yourself. It was not even a good attempt. You were betrayed, Monsieur, before you entered my *salon* for the first time—before you even entered our house. No, Monsieur, do not turn that angry regard on the lady who employed you to work her revenge on me—*she* did not give you away. But *I* saw you and heard you angrily rebuke a horse which nuzzled your pocket. I asked myself why a horse usually nuzzles pockets? And, of course, the only answer suggested itself: the horse smells sugar in the pocket.

"Yet, since you were angry with the creature, you were obviously not one of those kindly men who habitually carry sugar for horses in their pockets. Yet the horse *had* smelled sugar in your pocket; *ergo,* you were carrying sugar. And if this sugar was not for a horse, for what purpose were you carrying it?"

"Why, then," asked Monsieur Souvigny, who seemed to have recovered his *sang-froid,* "did you permit the *charade* to run its full length? You knew that the searchers had failed to find what you knew I carried—why then did you not denounce me?"

"Because I wished to show Madame la Baronne," and here Dupin made the lady a bow, "that I am not quite the imbecile for which she seems to have mistaken me. Because she sought revenge, and I wished to demonstrate to her that she has not gained it."

"Well, then," said Monsieur Souvigny, rising from his chair, "I suppose that the only thing that I may do is to return to London."

"Pray be seated again, Monsieur," said G——, in a tone of cold civility. "Since Monsieur le Chevalier has informed me that the Jewel was never in his family's possession, I shall have to ask you to accept our hospitality in the Rue de Jerusalem, while we endeavor to discover how so valuable a relic of antiquity—oh, indeed, Monsieur, I find myself warmly accepting your conclusion that it was once part of the ancient Regalia of France—*how* so valuable a relic, I repeat, came to be in *your* possession.

"Our inquiries," G—— continued carelessly, "may well take us

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some time—possibly years—since we already have so many pressing affairs to claim our immediate attention. But do not despair, Monsieur, we shall, I promise you, come eventually to the consideration of your affairs—and in prison, Monsieur, you may care to reflect on the relative intellectual capacities of Madame la Baronne and Monsieur le Chevalier."

The Prefect of the Parisian police made a sign to Sergeant Fournier, and that functionary asked Monsieur Souvigny, with all official civility, to accompany him to that grim house in the Rue de Jerusalem.

So ended, to the discomfiture of the two plotters and the complete restoration of their victim's good name, the first and—to the best of my knowledge—the last attempt to blacken the reputation of my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin.

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Robert L. Fish

No Rough Stuff

Introducing a new character—Johnny Steele, ex-con on parole, the man with the educated fingers who is an expert in recovering "lost" articles. But always with finesse—no violence, no safecracking, no armed holdup—just nimble fingers and nimble brain . . .

"Crooked dice!" Lou Reisman said to his partner, hanging up his hat. The two men were in the luxurious offices of Kramer & Reisman on Seventh Avenue in New York. Reisman had started talking as soon as he had entered; he went on as he headed for his desk. "The richest member of the club! It isn't even as if they rolled dice for dough; all they roll for is a lousy drink or two after a game. Anyway, the boys have been complaining, so I talked with Angie Martino in Shipping and he told me about this ex-con Johnny Steele who can open any lock there is. So I looked him up and last night I went to the club with him—I'm the president, right?—and he opened Max's locker in about two seconds flat—and you should have seen the lock Max had on it!—and—Sam! Are you listening to me?"

His partner studied him coldly.

"No," he said flatly. "So that's where you were last night. I tried calling you until after one."

Reisman frowned. "What about?"

"Trouble," Kramer said. "Big trouble." He sighed mightily. "You remember we had a style show here yesterday afternoon? Our new fall line?"

"Of course I remember."

"Which you were too busy to attend because you were all tied up with your stupid club business?"

"I was looking up this Johnny Steele," Reisman said evenly, refusing to be put on the defensive. "Anyway, what do I know about styles or shows? I'm the financial man in this partnership, Sam. You're the dress man."

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"I'm the dress man," Sam Kramer repeated expressionlessly, and shook his head. "I'm the company idiot, that's what I am!"

A sudden chill touched Reisman's spine. "What happened? The show was a flop?"

"The show was the best we ever had, according to Joe. He—"

"According to *Joe?* You weren't there?"

"I'm trying to tell you," Kramer said. "Just when the show is about ready to start, I get a phone call. They said it was Wickersham Hospital and that Marge had been in an accident. Well, it's raining but I finally get a cab and we fight that damn traffic over to the East side, and when I get there they never even heard of Marge. Then I waste another hour chasing all over the place because I'm still not convinced they know who they've got there and who they haven't, before I get the brilliant brainstorm of calling home. And Marge never left the house all day."

He suddenly struck himself on the forehead with his clenched fist.

"Marge is always home on Tuesdays. Her weekly bridge game."

Reisman closed his eyes and opened them. He didn't know what was coming but he was sure he wouldn't like it. "And?"

"And," Kramer said grimly, "when I get back here the show's just finishing. A show we restrict to buyers we know, clients we can trust not to run down to the corner and order cheap copies the minute they leave—and who do I see walking out? With a grin on his face a mile wide? Al Gordon. From Mexico." He rubbed the spot on his forehead where he had struck himself. "I already fired the kid on the door who let him in."

"From Mexico?"

"That's right. Gordon's got a sweat-shop operation down there. He copies designs he swipes up here, uses cheap labor, pays the duty, and still lands his junk up here at half our cost." His big fist slammed on the desk. "And now he's got our entire fall line!"

"He can't remember every style he saw—"

"Remember?" Sam Kramer stared at his partner. "Where've you been since the Civil War? He's got a cord around his neck that goes down inside the front of his shirt. If he doesn't have a small Japanese camera there, I'll—I'll—I'll join your damn club!"

"So why didn't you stop him?"

"Stop him? He's got two goons standing outside the door when he comes out of the showroom, and they're on either side of him when he gets into the elevator grinning like a hyena. What am I

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supposed to be around here, a hero? Get my arm broken? Or my neck?"

"So what did you do?"

"So what the hell *could* I do?"

"You could have called the cops!" Reisman said angrily. "A guy steals designs it's the same thing as stealing anything else!"

"Call the cops!" Kramer shook his head pityingly at his partner, getting a bit of his own back. "You expect him to be waiting for the cops with the film on a silver platter all wrapped up in a signed confession? Who saw the camera? Nobody; I asked Joe. Who saw him take any pictures? None of our people; I asked. All we'd get would be slapped with a suit for false arrest. That's all we need. Call the cops!"

There were several moments of silence as the two men stared at each other morosely. Suddenly Lou Reisman snapped his fingers.

"Steele!" he said.

"Pure robbery," Kramer agreed bitterly.

"No, no! *Johnny* Steele, the guy who opened that locker for me last night. I had a beer with him afterwards. We had a long talk; he says he was framed into the pen and I believe him. Anyway, he's quite a guy. I know where he hangs out, or one of the places, anyway. He'll know what to do."

And Lou Reisman, even as he said it, was suddenly sure he was right.

Johnny Steele was watching a high-stake game of cribbage in the back room of Riley's bar when he was finally run to earth. Steele was watching the game rather than playing for two good reasons. One, he was not fundamentally a gambler, in that he didn't particularly care about winning, while he had a basic prejudice against losing. Two, nobody familiar with him would let him get his educated fingers within a city block of a deck of cards, even for fun.

He did not seem especially surprised when Reisman tapped him on the arm, and he allowed himself to be led back to the front of the bar and installed in a booth across from the two partners. Three beers were ordered and delivered, and Steele leaned back, prepared to listen.

He was a well-built man in his early thirties, with broad shoulders, thick black hair beginning to be prematurely flecked with gray, bushy slanting eyebrows over deep-set gray eyes, and a

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quizzical cast to his features, as if wondering what new gimmick life would try to slip over on him, and already calculating his response. He was dressed in a conservative gray suit, and his hands were forever restless. A matchbook appeared as if by magic between his strong fingers and then as quickly disappeared to be replaced by a shining quarter.

Sam Kramer watched, fascinated, as the matchbook and quarter alternately came and went while Lou Reisman explained the problem. When Reisman had finished, Steele allowed both the matchbook and quarter to disappear together, took a long draft of his beer, and frowned.

"You both realize, of course, that all this happened yesterday. The film could already be on its way to Mexico, airmail. Or on its way anywhere else."

Kramer brought his eyes up from the empty fingers almost reluctantly. He considered the question and then shook his head.

"No," he said. "You don't know Al. He doesn't trust anything or anybody. He'd never trust it to the mails, especially the Mexican mails. It might get lost, or he might not be there when it arrived. No. My guess is that the film is in the safe of some hotel and that it'll stay there until he leaves town."

"And when does he do that? Or is it possible he already has?"

"I doubt it," Kramer said. "Our show was the first of the season for the out-of-town buyers. Eisenberg & Burnstein have theirs today, and Sillman Brothers tomorrow. The others might not mean much to Gordon, but those two shows he'd want to see. And steal from."

Steele drank his beer and looked up.

"What's this Gordon look like?"

"A tall sour-faced creep," Kramer said bitterly. "Maybe six-one, six-two. Likes to dress flashy. Skinny but tough. He's half bald, even though he's not much over forty. What little hair he's got is blond and curly." He thought of something else. "He's also got two goons with him. My guess is they go everywhere he goes."

Steele nodded as he filed the information away. He considered the problem for several moments and then came to a decision. Whatever it was seemed to amuse him, for his lips twitched slightly and then straightened.

"All right," he said agreeably. "Five thousand dollars if I get the film back, plus any expenses. Deal?"

There was a moment's silence, then Reisman nodded. "Deal."

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Sam Kramer frowned. If Steele got the film back, $5,000 was a bargain, but what were the chances, really? Sure, the guy was good at sleight of hand, and maybe he did break into some cheese-box golf locker; but—

"Hold it!" he said suddenly, one thought leading to another. "I hope you're not thinking of breaking into some hotel safe, or anything like that. We'd be—well, accessories, or something, and we're not about to agree to that. We're a respectable house, fifteen years in the business."

Steele smiled faintly. "I only break into safes with permission."

"And I certainly hope you're not thinking of guns or any rough stuff," Kramer added hastily, remembering the definition of an accomplice. "Guns, even empty guns, and somebody can get hurt. And we don't want anybody hurt, not even Al Gordon."

Steele's smile widened.

"My parole doesn't permit me to carry a gun," he said gently, "and personally I hate rough stuff."

"And no monkey business on airplanes. Or getting in trouble in Mexico. We do business there."

"I hate airplanes," Steele said honestly, "and my parole wouldn't permit me to leave the country if I wanted to."

Kramer frowned at him.

"And he's got those goons with him all the time," he said, his sharp eyes studying Steele's benign face. "My guess is they probably even sleep in the same room, or one of them, anyway. You can't get within a mile of him, so how are you going to get the film back?"

"It's a good question," Steele conceded, his eyes twinkling, a shiny dollar suddenly appearing in his fingers out of thin air.

The fifth telephone call located a Mr. Albert J. Gordon of Cuernavaca, Mexico, as being registered at the Philippe Hotel; it took only one call, with luck—to Aerolineas Mexicanas—to discover that an Albert J. Gordon had a reservation on the midnight flight the following evening, nonstop from Kennedy to Mexico City.

Johnny Steele had scarcely settled himself in a chair in the Philippe lobby that afternoon when a man answering Gordon's description entered and strode to the desk, accompanied by two rugged, taciturn men. Steele came to his feet easily and ambled past the trio, brushing past the guards in time to hear the clerk say, "Yes, sir, Mr. Gordon," and accept a small envelope for de-

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posit in the hotel safe. Its bulk was consistent with a small roll of microfilm.

It was the necessary identification that Steele required. He also noted that the keen competition in the garment trade had obviously prevented a warning to be circulated to Eisenberg & Burnstein. The goons with Gordon were not known personally to Steele, but he was quite familiar with the type. Local talent, he was sure, hired on arrival and undoubtedly to be dismissed at the airport on departure. He smiled faintly and continued out to the street. One more errand and he would be ready to earn his fee.

At seven o'clock, his props all arranged and left in a small overnight bag in his apartment, Johnny Steele was back in Riley's bar, nursing a beer and watching the cribbage game, his assignment forgotten for the moment. A half dollar appeared in his fingers and rolled itself back and forth across his knuckles as he watched. It occurred to him that the penalty for cutting the deck in cribbage had to make it the easiest game in the world in which to cheat, and he wondered which ancient cardsharp had first made that rule a part of the game.

Al Gordon, his bags packed and ready to leave New York, was feeling a presentiment and he did not like it. He had stolen designs for too many years to start becoming nervous now, he told himself, but the feeling of dread persisted.

It was unfortunate that Kramer had returned from the hospital before Gordon could leave the the showing; the show had been a long one and he shouldn't have waited until the end. Still, the fact that to date Sam Kramer had done nothing to try to recover the film was the very proof that there really wasn't much Sam could do. Unless, of course, Sam really hadn't recognized him, although that seemed hard to believe.

Still, if Kramer had intended to call the cops, he would have done it before now; and Sam was too chicken-hearted to hire any rough stuff. And what third choice was there? None. So why this silly feeling of nervousness?

Well, for one thing, because if he were in Sam Kramer's shoes he knew he would do something. He didn't know what, but definitely *something*. And for another, the period of maximum vulnerability would be from now until he entered the plane. He touched the padded handkerchief holding the three small rolls of microfilm, feeling the bulk in his pocket, and came to his feet, his

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two bodyguards following suit. Time to go.

He led the way from the room, the guards carrying his luggage, paid his bill, and made his way outside. He refused the taxi the Philippe doorman called up, preferring to select one himself from those cruising down Fifth Avenue, and climbed in between the two guards, his hand pressing the valuable bulge in his pocket.

The trip to Kennedy was uneventful, but his nervousness unaccountably grew. They pulled up before the entrance to Aerolineas Mexicanas in the main terminal building, and Gordon entered closely flanked by the two thugs, his attaché case in one hand, his other hand plunged deep into the pocket with the film. The large bag was checked through, his seat assignment made, and the three men moved toward the firstclass lounge. The bodyguards were under instructions from their boss to put the customer on the plane, and that meant *on* the plane, and not at the terminal entrance.

The lounge at this early hour was deserted except for a man in a sports jacket leafing through a magazine in one corner and the attendant polishing glasses behind the small stand-up bar. The three men moved toward this oasis automatically. The attendant put down his glass and turned to face them.

"Beer," said the two toughs in unison. Serious drinking on the job was forbidden.

"Not for me," Gordon said. The premonition of disaster was deepening. "Make it a Scotch. Straight. In fact, make it a double."

The attendant turned to the bottles on the shelf behind him, stretching for one. Gordon frowned. Was it possible that Kramer might have bribed the attendant to dope his drink? Ridiculous, he said to himself; you're getting positively senile. He reached for a handkerchief to pat his sweating brow, saw what he was holding, and jammed it back into his pocket, furious with himself. A second handkerchief supplied the need and he stared at the large glass of whiskey before him, nearly hypnotized by its amber color. The man on either side of him drank his beer thirstily. Suddenly Gordon relaxed.

Why hadn't Kramer tried to get the film back? The answer had to be that he *had* tried and failed. He had probably hired someone, warned him against any illegality such as safecracking or armed holdup, and expected results. He could picture Sam now, probably warning his man against trying any games on airplanes, or in foreign countries. Poor chicken-hearted Sam! And also, poor

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hired man, whoever he was, undoubtedly sitting around feeling frustrated and restricted. Without rough stuff what hope did he have? And now it was even too late for rough stuff; the plane departure was being announced at that moment.

Gordon smiled and picked up his whiskey, drinking it in quick swallows, feeling the welcome warmth instantly spreading through him and easing his tension. He turned to stare around the lounge. The place had filled up; people were shoving along the bar, anxious for a quick drink before takeoff, but his person was adequately protected by the two monoliths, one on each side.

A man in a sports jacket, bag in hand, was pushing through the door to the Men's Room; his corner had been taken by a mother attempting to bundle her three young children and their plane requirements into some form of transportable order. Gordon smiled; they would do as well as his bodyguards once he left them at the barrier.

The three men were side by side as Gordon checked through; he waited until the mother and her brood appeared before waving off his two guards and then placing himself in the midst of the three tired children. The two bodyguards remained, watching as the line inched patiently forward to boarding. The two kept their eyes rigidly on their customer until he had passed the sky-marshal inspection station and had moved to the door of the plane.

Gordon paused in the doorway, his hand once again gripping his precious handkerchief, and waved with his attaché case; then he had disappeared inside the plane, a grin on his face.

As he strapped himself into his seat and tightened the seatbelt, he promised himself a thorough medical checkup as soon as he got home. An attack of nerves like the one he had just suffered—and suffered needlessly—was something that had to be looked into at once. The Miami Beach style shows were scheduled for the following month, and he certainly didn't want to go through something like this again.

The three little tubes of microfilm stood side by side on Sam Kramer's desk. They had been carefully examined; they were quite authentic. Kramer was studying Steele's face with an expression as close to awe as he was capable of. Lou Reisman was smiling faintly, his faith in Johnny Steele justified. Steele, relaxing in a chair, was explaining in a soft voice.

"I was in the same cell as Billy Jenks for four years," he said,

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"until poor Billy took sick and died, but he taught me all he knew. And he knew plenty. For practice he'd ask a guard a question and I'd switch things from one of the guard's pockets to another while he was answering.

"I always felt," he went on, his smile fixed, his mind apparently far away, "that what Billy and I used to do was some sort of challenge. But a sky-marshal's inspection station at an airport these days? It's like having a license to steal. Can you imagine? A man standing before you, his hands in the air, asking you to run your hands up and down his clothes? And those poor inspectors are so busy that when a man in uniform—any uniform as long as it has a badge—appears and says he's been assigned to help, they're only too happy to have him."

Kramer sounded shocked. "You impersonated a cop?"

Steele shook his head.

"That would be against my parole," he said. "I used a School Guard's uniform, but it *did* have a badge."

"But how—?"

"Well," Steele said, serious again, "I was sure he wouldn't ship the film through in his luggage; you might have bribed one of the Aerolineas staff to search through it. The chances were against, but why take a chance at all? Nor did I feel he'd keep the film in his attaché case; if he fell asleep on the plane anyone might have opened it. No, the safest place he could think of was on his person, in his pocket with his hand holding it.

"I was also sure he'd have it wrapped in tissue, or a handkerchief, or in an envelope, to protect it from being scratched. And I had all three ready—tissue, handkerchief, envelope. When he showed me in the lounge that it was a handkerchief and in which pocket, that helped, but it really wasn't necessary. The way sky marshals are permitted to frisk a person, I could have made the switch if he'd had it under his hat."

Steele shrugged, his eyes twinkling. "After that it was merely a matter of ducking into the Men's Room and changing clothes."

"Beautiful!" Reisman said, and glanced down at the expense account that Steele had given him. His eyebrows rose in honest surprise. "This is all?"

"That's it," Steele said. "Just a few cab fares and the uniform rental." He smiled and came to his feet. "I didn't charge you for the handkerchief I wrapped them in for the switch; I took that from one of Gordon's bodyguards back at the Philippe Hotel."

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Lawrence G. Blochman

Dr. Coffee and the Whiz Kid

This Dr. Coffee novelet is one of the best in the series about the pathologist-detective of Pasteur Hospital, Northbank, U.S.A. Once again the 'tec team of Lieutenant Max Ritter and Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee tackle an unusual mystery, but this time Ritter has a personal stake in the outcome. His sister's adopted son is a Vietnamese orphan named Nguyen Quong-trang, now called Jake. The boy was first brought up as a Buddhist, then as a Catholic, and is now attending Jewish, Protestant, and Quaker schools; even more important, he has an extremely high I.Q. Can such a boy, with such a background (each foster parent is a Ph.D.), be a juvenile delinquent? . . .

Detective: DR. DANIEL WEBSTER COFFEE

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee sat before his microscope diagnosing tissue from Thursday's surgery when Detective Lieutenant Max Ritter stalked into the pathology laboratory at Pasteur Hospital with another man in tow.

"Hi, Doc," said the Northbank Police Department's tallest and skinniest homicide specialist. "Meet Detective Sergeant Kendall."

Dr. Coffee looked up to behold a husky prognathous redhead twice as broad but only two-thirds as tall as Ritter. The sergeant extended a bear's paw of a hand.

"Meetcha," said the sergeant.

"Greetings." The pathologist reflected that any number of forward-passing quarterbacks would envy that hand. "What's up, Max?"

"My sister's young kid Jake," Ritter said. "He ain't here?"

"He was, but he's long gone." Dr. Coffee frowned. "He should have reached home hours ago."

"He never got there," said Ritter.

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"Disappeared," said Sergeant Kendall.

Dr. Coffee arose suddenly. A feeling of vague foreboding passed over him like a breath of cold wind. He had experienced the same uneasiness the day before when he had first heard about Max's young nephew Jake. Good lord, was it really only yesterday, less than twenty-four hours ago, that Ritter had come to get him in a police car?

There had been no reason for the uneasiness, unless it was his feeling that he was not really doing Ritter a favor. When the pathologist got into the car parked in front of the hospital, Ritter had said to him, "I sure appreciate this, Doc. And my mother will kiss you. Or anyhow bake you some of that strudel you like."

"It's absolutely crazy, Max." Dr. Coffee had shaken his head. "I won't be able to do anything for the boy. He should see a good psychiatrist, or at least a clinical child psychologist. I'm a lab man, Max, and what can—?"

"Don't argue!" The detective put the car in gear. "For mama you're a wizard. Ever since you cured her black Chow-dog tongue by telling her to stop taking bismuth tablets, she thinks you can do anything. And when she heard your wife was out of town visiting relatives this week, she insisted you come to dinner, and she'll invite my sister and her husband to come and bring the kid so you can see him. You know you can't cross mama."

The car stopped for a red light.

"I don't recall your ever talking about your sister before," Dr. Coffee said.

"We've never been what you might call palsy-walsy," Ritter had said. "She's ten years older and she was always papa's pet when the old man was alive. She went east to college. She got a Pee Aitch Dee come louder, a Phi Bait key, and a husband. I'm just a high-school dropout. Besides, Esther says I'm practically a goy."

The light turned green.

Dr. Coffee had known little about the bachelor detective's family life except that he was devoted to his widowed mother. He had only then learned that Max's older sister Esther was married to a professor of comparative religion at Northbank State College—a Dr. Irving Liebman with degrees from Vienna, the Sorbonne, and Oxford; the professor had been teaching at Columbia when Esther Ritter was getting her doctorate. The couple had adopted a Vietnamese orphan named Nguyen Quong-trang who for obvious reasons became Irving Liebman, Junior on his adoption papers,

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but whom everyone but his parents called "Jake."

"Tell me more about Jake," said Dr. Coffee, as Ritter swung north toward the once-stylish Heights neighborhood, now rapidly becoming a Northbank backwater. The detective had obliged.

It seemed that the Liebmans had adopted Jake through the intercession of a U.S. Army chaplain, Captain Amos Misch, who had once been rabbi of Northbank's Temple Beth Israel, and who had insisted that Jake was half Jewish. His reputed and unmarried father, the chaplain had said, was a Northbank man named Joe Straus, one of the first American advisers in Vietnam. Although a noncombatant, Straus had nevertheless been blown up by a land mine.

"Myself, I got doubts about Joe Straus being Jake's father," Ritter said, "because Jake is very bright—a whiz kid, you might say—and Joe Straus wasn't. I went to school with Joe and any brains he could pass on to a kid you could put in a thimble and have room left over for a dime's worth of bubble gum. Joe was what my mother would call a first-class schlemiel, and I ain't surprised he got blown up."

"But little Jake is a genius?"

"You'll see. If only he didn't have this—this thing I'm telling you about."

"He steals?"

"He steals. He says he can't help it. He admits he knows better but he says the urge is too strong for him."

"I could recommend a behavior therapist who deals with compulsions like that," the pathologist said. "It may be a conditioned reflex he picked up in Vietnam."

Ritter shook his head as he turned into a tree-lined street. "Jake ain't one of them wild street kids. His ma died shortly after Joe was killed, but she first left the kid with a Catholic orphanage. But you'll see for yourself. Here we are, Doc."

The police car stopped in the driveway of a two-story frame house. The white paint was peeling from the clapboards and the Victorian gingerbread that garlanded the eaves, but the red geraniums in the window boxes bloomed brightly and the curtains at the windows were stiffly immaculate.

"Come in, come in, Doctor. You are an angel to come. How is your good wife?"

"She's fine, Mrs. Ritter."

Mrs. Ritter was difficult to pigeonhole. Dr. Coffee would never

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have taken her for the mother of a high-ranking police detective. She certainly was not the caricature of the stereotyped Jewish mother, and he could not picture her as the mother of a scholarly female doctor of philosophy whose dissertation was entitled "The Interrelation of Climate and the Russian Novel as a Major Influence on the October Revolution."

Ma Ritter was plump and rather short. Her pink scalp glowed through the bluish tinge of thinning white hair. Her old-fashioned-length dark dress was probably homemade, but it was not dowdy. She moved with a certain grace.

"Please sit down, Doctor. My daughter and her family will be a little late. She just phoned. You'll take a glass of wine in the meantime?"

"No, mama, no!" Ritter made a panic gesture. "Doc can't drink that sweet Concord grape stuff. He breaks out in hives."

"Don't talk foolishness, Max." Mrs. Ritter smiled apologetically to the pathologist. "Max is such a joker."

"No joke, mama. Kosher wine gives him boils. I got a bottle of honest poison in my room. I'll fix him up."

When the detective had disappeared, his mother said, "I hope you can help little Jake, Doctor. Did Max tell you how worried I am?"

"I'm sure he'll be all right, Mrs. Ritter."

"Unless that judge decides to send him away. Didn't Max tell you? If it wasn't for Max they would send him to some farm for juvenile delinquents."

Max Ritter returned juggling two drinks and his mother's glass of wine.

"To your good health, Mrs. Ritter." Ice tinkled as Dr. Coffee raised his glass. He scowled at Ritter reproachfully. "Max, you didn't tell me the boy had been arrested."

The detective's Adam's apple bobbed twice in his long neck, and a slow flush mounted to the tips of his outsize ears. "It's just a formality," he said. "The kid was released in my custody. Kendall couldn't help himself, so he went through the motions—"

"Who's Kendall?" Dr. Coffee interrupted.

"A detective sergeant. You don't know him. He was with the pickpocket squad in Chicago before he did a trick in Asia with the Marines. Then he came here. He catches odd jobs when he ain't karate instructor to the force."

"Karate?"

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"All Northbank cops got to learn the fundamentals now," Ritter said. "And Kendall is a Black Belt. He can break two one-inch planks with a barehanded chop or an elbow smash. Anyhow, Kendall got a call from Jimmy Jamaica—"

"Hold on, Max, you've lost me again. Who's Jimmy Jamaica?"

"He's the blind man who owns this candy and stationery store across from Jake's school, the place Jake's been stealing chocolate bars from."

"You mean Jamaica called in the police just because a boy took some candy?"

"Not the first time, Doc. This is going on quite a while. At first Jimmy Jamaica boxed his ears when he caught him. Then he took him to the principal of the school and said next he'd call the cops. The principal called Jake's father and the kid promised he wouldn't do it again, but he broke his promise."

"Max, he's only a child," Mrs. Ritter interrupted. "So he forgot his promise."

"Mama, he didn't forget. He's got a brain like Einstein. Something's wrong with the kid. You know it yourself since you asked me to bring Doc to look him over. Wait till you see him, Doc."

As if on cue, the front doorbell played a lively tune and the door opened. While Irving Liebman, Junior's finger was still on the bell button, his family entered. Esther Ritter Liebman appeared first, apologizing for being late—the boy was taking a nap and they didn't want to wake him. She and her brother had obviously not inherited their dominant genes from the same parent. While Ritter was lean and angular, his sister was short and plump. She wore a blonde wig, a superior smile, and a Phi Beta Kappa key suspended on a gold chain above her ample bosom.

Professor Liebman was not much taller but he was better proportioned. His silky black beard curled slightly above his blue polka-dot bow tie and his stern eyes peered through thick spectacles with octagonal gold rims. He bowed slightly from the waist in pre-Anschluss-Vienna fashion.

The youngster was still playing a tune on the doorbell while the preliminary introductions were made. A sharp "Irving" from his foster father reminded him that he was expected inside.

"Hello," the boy said, pressing the palms of his hands together with the fingertips pointing to his chin. Then he solemnly shook hands all around. He was an appealing lad. Although his Eurasian origin was evident in some of his features, his black eyes

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were distinctly non-Asiatic. They were big and wondering, and the lids lacked the Mongolian fold.

"Irving, Dr. Coffee is a pathologist," said Professor Liebman. "Do you know what a pathologist is?"

"Sure," said the boy. "He tries to find out what makes people sick, and if they die anyhow, he takes them apart to find out why."

"His English has a fine American accent," said Dr. Coffee.

"He speaks French and Vietnamese, and he's learning German," said his foster mother proudly.

"He's going to study Russian next year," the professor added. "He wants to enter the foreign service."

"Last month he wanted to be a big-league ball player," said Ritter. "Did the Mets win today, Jake?"

"Not yet," the boy said. "They play the Giants on the coast tonight, but they should win. Seaver's pitching."

"Who's leading the National League in batting, Jake?" Ritter continued. "Willie Mays?"

The boy stuck his tongue out at the detective. "You're kidding me. You know Mays hasn't led the league since 1954. It's Pete Rose right now. He's hitting .348."

"In March he wanted to be an astronaut," said Professor Liebman. "How far away is the moon, Irving?"

"At its apogee, 252,710 miles."

"Don't ask him if he knows Einstein's equation," said Ritter, "because he'll tell you, and I bet even Esther don't understand it."

"As long as he doesn't grow up to be a cop like his Uncle Max," Esther Liebman said.

"Please everybody come in the dining room," said Mrs. Ritter. "Max, you'll carve the chicken. The matzo balls I made especially for you, Doctor Coffee, even if it isn't Passover. Max said you raved about them when you were here last time."

Dr. Coffee did indeed appreciate the culinary skills of Mama Ritter. Although a zealous votary of the more sophisticated aromatic spectrum of classical *haute cuisine*, he had a great liking for the subtle variations of good uncomplicated fare. After all, what could an Escoffier or a Prosper Montagné do to a roasting chicken to improve the succulence of Mama Ritter's bird?

Dr. Coffee did not let his gastronomic enjoyment distract him from the primary purpose of his visit. He watched intently every mouthful consumed by the young Eurasian kleptomaniac, if such

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he was. He was particularly interested by the gusto with which the boy attacked Mama Ritter's apple strudel.

"You like dessert, don't you, Jake?" he asked. "Cookies and ice cream?"

"You bet."

"And candy?"

A peculiar look came over the boy's face. He was suddenly on his guard. He nodded, but said nothing.

"Your Uncle Max tells me you've been taking candy from a store near your school," Dr. Coffee pursued, "without paying for it." Again the boy nodded. His lower lip advanced slightly. "Why is that?"

"I didn't have any money. And anyhow, other kids do the same thing and they don't get in trouble."

"Don't you get any sweets at home?"

"He gets plenty of sweets," Esther Liebman broke in. "We eat desserts regularly."

"Do you give him candy?" Dr. Coffee redirected his question.

"Certainly, once in a while," replied Professor Liebman. "Too much candy is not good for a boy whose teeth are still forming. Isn't that so, Doctor?"

Dr. Coffee made a noncommittal gesture. He seemed preoccupied with Mama Ritter's strudel.

"He certainly knows right from wrong," said Esther Liebman defensively, as if someone had accused her of faulty upbringing. "We certainly haven't neglected the moral or spiritual side of his education, have we, Irving?"

"The boy has been subjected to ethical bombardment from all sides." Professor Liebman pointed the tip of his beard in Dr. Coffee's direction as he made the announcement. "He was first brought up as a Buddhist, then as a Catholic. We want him to know something of our own faith, naturally, but he sometimes attends a Protestant Sunday school with a classmate. We want to expose him to all religions, and when he gets old enough to understand them, to choose the one he finds most compatible."

"More strudel, Doctor?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Ritter. It's delicious, but—"

"Just a little piece. No? Then Esther, will you please serve the coffee."

Dr. Coffee watched the boy's eyes follow the strudel as it disappeared into the kitchen. He leaned across the table and said,

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"Jake, tomorrow's Saturday, so you don't go to school—right?"

"This Saturday we were planning to go to a Quaker meeting," Professor Liebman volunteered.

"Then perhaps, Professor, you could bring the boy to Pasteur Hospital instead?"

"Hospital?" Mama Ritter was alarmed. "Why do you have to put him in the hospital?"

"Only for an hour, Mrs. Ritter, in my laboratory. With his parents' permission I'd like to make a few tests."

"I'd be glad to bring him, Doctor."

"He doesn't have to take me," said Jake. "Like I'll come by myself. I've never seen a laboratory. What are you going to do to me?"

"Nothing that will hurt," Dr. Coffee tried his best to remember the bedside manner from his intern days—how long ago was it? Good lord, twenty, thirty years! "Maybe I'll take a sample of your blood."

"Blood?" echoed Mama Ritter. "What for?"

"Just a few drops."

"Wow!" said Jake. "Will you teach me how to do it?"

"Certainly," Dr. Coffee smiled. "Come before lunch. Say about noon, pathology lab, fifth floor, Pasteur Hospital."

"He'll be there, I promise," said Professor Liebman.

In the police car Dr. Coffee said, "Max, do you suppose that candy store is still open?"

"Could be," said Ritter. "Jimmy Jamaica lives upstairs. We can try."

"I'd like to stop off there, if you don't mind. Is the man really blind?"

"He sees a little out of one eye—enough to catch kids that swipe his Creamy Crunch and Chunky Chucknuts. And what he don't see, Maggie Dorwin sees for him. She's his housekeeper and sorta takes care of him."

"Do you think Jake is telling the truth—that Jamaica lets some kids steal candy but cracks down on Jake exclusively?"

"If you mean is Jimmy Jamaica a racist who don't like Jake because he's half Jewish and half Vietnamese, the answer is no. Jake's special playmates, the ones he says get away with swiping stuff, are mostly blacks and Latins. What are you going to test the kid for tomorrow, Doc?"

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"I'd rather not speculate, Max."

"But you think he's got something wrong?"

"Let's say I suspect something's wrong physically."

"Hope it's not serious," Ritter said. "I like that kid. He's going to grow up to be really somebody if that sister of mine and her trained poodle don't ruin him."

The police car turned a corner at the Calvin Coolidge Grammar School and drew up in front of the two-storey frame building that was Jimmy Jamaica's Scholastic Candy and Stationery Store. There was a light burning inside when Ritter braked to a stop, but the store went dark as he switched off the ignition. He and Dr. Coffee got out of opposite sides of the car.

The front door of the shop was locked. Ritter rattled the knob, played a toccata and fugue on the doorbell, then banged gently on glass panel with the flashlight he was carrying. When there was no response, he sent the flashlight beam through the glass to explore the darkness inside. In about a minute an apparition loomed in the circle of light—a blue-eyed Medusa head with a frightening halo of bright red curlers.

"We're closed," shouted the Medusa through the glass. "What do you want?"

"Tell Jimmy Jamaica that Lieutenant Ritter wants to see him."

"Jimmy's gone to bed." The Medusa made no move to open the door.

"Get him down. Tell him I want to speak to him."

The apparition vanished from the circle of brightness.

"Who's the gorgon?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Gorgon? I guess you mean Maggie Dorwin. She's Jimmy Jamaica's seeing-eye dog and whatnot. Ain't she a dish?"

The pathologist chuckled.

It was several minutes before an emaciated elderly man with an incongruously developed potbelly shuffled up to the glass door and into the field of Ritter's flashlight. He wore dark glasses. He was in his undershirt and his suspenders hung down outside his trousers.

"What do you want?" he shouted through the door.

"Open up, Jimmy. Dr. Coffee here wants to talk to you about my sister's kid."

"I got nothing more to say about that thieving little brat. He ain't my worry no more. Tell your friend to talk to Sergeant Kendall. It's his baby now."

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"Quit stalling, Jimmy. Let us in."

"You got a warrant?" Maggie Dorwin's Medusa head reappeared over Jamaica's shoulder.

"Come on, Jimmy. You know we don't need a warrant to talk to you. Open up."

"You got to have a warrant this time of night. I know my constitutional rights. I got the right—"

"I know, I know. The Fourth Amendment. You got a right to be secure in your house and person against unreasonable search and seizure. Well, we ain't gonna search or seize—"

Ritter stopped when he realized he was talking to the dark. Jimmy Jamaica and Maggie Dorwin had withdrawn from the searching beam of his light.

"Shall I bust in?" Ritter asked.

"Don't bother. We can talk to him after I've run my tests. Drive me home now, Max, and I'll give you a brandy."

Jake Liebman, né Nguyen Quong-trang, arrived at Dr. Coffee's laboratory next day promptly, out of breath, and wide-eyed with excited curiosity.

"Hey, this is groovy!" he exclaimed as he looked around at the mysterious chromium apparatus and glistening glassware. "I've never been in a lab before."

The boy leaned against a wall.

"You're all in, Jake," Dr. Coffee said. "Did you walk over here?"

"No. My father drove me to the hospital. But I missed the elevator and I was afraid I'd be late, so I ran up the stairs."

"Do you get tired like this often?"

"No. Well, sometimes before dinner I lie down and read. What's that round thing there?"

"That's a centrifuge."

"What's it for?"

"It spins test tubes around several thousand times a minute. It separates things—like a cream separator. It separates bacteria from spinal fluid, blood cells from the serum—"

"Are you going to spin some of my blood in there?"

"Not today, Jake. I'm going to put a little of your blood in that machine over there. It's a photoelectric colorimeter."

"What does it do?"

"It has an electronic eye that looks at your blood and tells us how much of everything is in it."

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"Like what? Don't you already know what's in everybody's blood?"

"Not the precise amounts, Jake. For instance, I don't know exactly how much sugar you've got in your blood."

"So that's it again." The boy's face darkened. He looked at the floor. "You don't need the machine for that. I already told about stealing the candy. I think I'll go home."

"Now wait a minute, Jake—"

"You're trying to get me to, you know, squeal on somebody else, but I won't. I don't tell on other people. Not ever."

"I think we understand each other." The pathologist held out his hand. "Shake. I'm just trying to help you and I think this whole business will be cleared up this afternoon."

The boy silently took his hand.

"Jake, I want you to meet Dr. Mookerji." Dr. Coffee presented his pear-shaped resident pathologist. "He's from India."

The boy stared at Dr. Mookerji's pink turban as he shook the plump brown hand of the man from Calcutta.

"Am delighted to meet fellow Asian," said Dr. Mookerji.

"I knew a man from India," said Jake. "He was the watchman at the orphanage in Saigon. But he had, you know, a red turban and whiskers. Why don't you have whiskers?"

"Watchman was no doubt Sikh," said Dr. Mookerji. "Personally am Bengali."

"If you'll go with Dr. Mookerji, Jake," said Dr. Coffee, "he'll introduce you to that pretty girl over there in a white smock—her name is Doris Hudson. They'll take a sample of your blood and then you can go home. Should I call your Uncle Max to come by for you?"

"I'll take the bus. I've got my school tickets."

Dr. Coffee considered giving the boy an injection of glucose before he left, but instead handed him a chocolate bar to eat on the way home.

When he dialed the number of Professor Irving Liebman, Ph.D., Dr. Coffee had the colorimeter readings in front of him.

"Professor, you won't have to worry any more about your boy stealing candy. That was a purely physiological response."

"Don't you mean *psy*chological, Doctor?"

"*Phys*iological. His body has an overwhelming hunger for sugar. He has a mild case of hypoglycemia—or hyperinsulinism."

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"That sounds terrible. What is it?"

"He has an overactive pancreas—diabetes in reverse, you might call it. His blood sugar is below normal. His pancreas secretes more insulin than he can use, and it burns up too much of the blood sugar he needs for energy. And since you people probably ration his sweets at home, he instinctively replaces the missing energy by stealing and eating candy."

"Curious. But is this hypoglycemia serious?"

"Probably not, if it's treated. If you'll give me the name of your family physician I'll tell him about my preliminary findings, which are only indicative. He'll probably want to run a glucose tolerance test for a more extensive diagnosis, and of course he'll want to rule out certain other possibilities. Meanwhile let the boy eat sweets, particularly when he's tired."

"Thank you, Doctor Coffee. Is Irving still with you?"

"He should be home at any minute now. He took the bus."

But the boy did not get home "at any minute now." In fact, he had not reached home by 4:30 when Max Ritter barged into the pathology lab with Sergeant Kendall in tow.

"How long since the kid left here?" Ritter asked.

Dr. Coffee turned to Doris Hudson who sat beside him at the microscope, a notebook in her lap. "Two hours, Doris?"

"More than three, Doctor."

"Sergeant Kendall and I stopped by the place fifteen minutes ago and he wasn't home yet. My sister and that egghead she lives with are ready to climb walls."

"The juvenile probation people want to talk to him," said Sergeant Kendall. "We think we can fix things up."

"You'd better let me go along. I can explain the whole matter." The pathologist told the detectives about the boy's "diabetes in reverse," and added, "You might say his petty larceny was dictated by nature's need to correct his blood-sugar deficiency."

"Sure, come along if you want," Ritter said. "But we better find the kid first. My sister is going nuts."

"Where would you look first?" Dr. Coffee asked. "He told me he was going right home on the bus."

Sergeant Kendall made a funny face. "I know where I'd look," he said. "Jimmy Jamaica's joint."

"Why Jamaica's?"

"To get even with the old buzzard for blowing the whistle on him."

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"You think a kid his age would nurse that kind of grudge?"

Sergeant Kendall's red eyebrows expressed surprise that his thesis should even be questioned. "Sure. He's half gook."

"Let's start there anyhow," Ritter said.

Jimmy Jamaica's front door was still locked. A sign inside the glass that read "Closed" offered no further explanation. "Maybe he's closed Saturdays because there's no school," Dr. Coffee suggested.

Ritter banged on the door and rattled the knob. "He must be here. He phoned me about an hour ago, a little before Kendall came by to pick me up."

"Why did he phone you?"

"I dunno. He says drop in this afternoon, I got something to talk to you about. Shall we call the Safe and Loft Squad or have you got your Open-sesame with you?"

Sergeant Kendall produced a bunch of keys and in two minutes the door was open.

In four minutes Lieutenant Ritter was telephoning to the technicians of the Homicide Squad.

Jimmy Jamaica lay on his back behind his candy counter, one hand above his head, the other hand resting in a scatter of cigarettes and Bonbon Bars. Even before Dr. Coffee had confirmed the absence of vital signs, it was obvious he was dead.

Dr. Coffee made a quick, if illegal, examination of the body before the photographers and fingerprint men arrived. He found no apparent bullet wound, no blood, no visible signs of brute force. He tried lifting the outstretched arm. It resisted him.

"Funny," Ritter commented. "He's already in rigor mortis, but he was alive only an hour ago."

"Then one of two things must have happened," said the pathologist. "Either it was someone else who phoned you, pretending to be Jamaica, or he died in a convulsion or while struggling. In the latter case rigor mortis sets in very quickly, sometimes in less than an hour."

"If you want to do an autopsy," Ritter said, "I'll fix it with the coroner. Anyhow, we still gotta find Jake."

"What about the woman who was here last night?" the pathologist asked.

"Maggie Dorwin," Ritter said. "She's got a room upstairs."

"She not there." Sergeant Kendall snapped his fingers. "I know

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several places she might be at. Here comes your crew, Max, so I'll go pick her up. I'll bring her to headquarters."

When the experts got into high gear with their paraphernalia, Ritter and Dr. Coffee climbed the stairs to the second-floor apartment. They did not find Maggie Dorwin there. Neither did they find Irving Liebman, Jr., né Nguyen Quong-trang. What they did find surprised and puzzled them.

In the room that was obviously Jimmy Jamaica's there was a disarray of empty bottles under an unmade bed, dirty clothes piled in corners, three white canes stuck in a wastebacket, a dozen wrist watches carelessly strewn on a dresser top. The dresser drawers revealed, in addition to socks and underwear, more wrist watches of all sorts.

On the floor of a kitchenette a bag of groceries had been dropped. The bag had burst, spilling out a carton of milk, a loaf of bread, a package of bacon, a tin of coffee, a cellophane sheath of sliced cheese.

There was a definitely feminine accent in the second bedroom—jars and bottles of cosmetic preparations on the dressing table—but both men were goggle-eyed over what they saw in the open suitcases on the bed. One of them was cluttered with nylon stockings, panty hose, women's gloves, and dozens of transistor radios. In the other was a jumble of petit-point handbags, bottles of perfume, and embroidered lingerie. On a shelf in the closet was a cardboard box full of rings, brooches, and earrings.

Dr. Coffee, bending over the suitcases on the bed, suddenly straightened and ran his long fingers through his tousled mop of sandy hair. There was a shadow of apprehension in his gray eyes as he became aware of the possible significance of what they had just discovered. He could not pinpoint all the ramifications, but the same feeling of cold foreboding he had first experienced twenty-four hours before again touched his spine.

"Max!" Dr. Coffee was giving orders now. The pathologist was directing the surgeon to proceed according to his microscopic diagnosis. "Max! Get a description of your sister's kid to the whole Northbank police force, the sheriff's office, and the State Police. The boy's in danger."

"Kidnaping, Doc?"

"An understatement, Max. Whoever killed Jimmy Jamaica—"

"You don't think Jimmy just dropped dead?"

"It's safer to assume he was murdered. Max, get moving!"

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Esther Ritter Liebman was having her hysterics as quietly as she believed compatible with her status as a Doctor of Philosophy and the wife of a Professor of Comparative Religion. She lay on her chaise longue crying silently and taking an occasional sniff of smelling salts in the best turn-of-the-century manner.

The professor was taking the disappearance of his adopted son calmly—almost to the point of apathy, Dr. Coffee thought as he listened to Max Ritter question his brother-in-law. There was no use losing one's head over this contretemps, said the professor, because that's what it was—a contretemps. Why foresee a possible tragic outcome when things would probably turn out all right?

"We have always encouraged young Irving to be self-reliant," he said, "and I have every confidence he is well able to take care of himself."

No, the boy had not telephoned. No, there had been no phone call demanding ransom or making threats.

"The phone has rung only once this afternoon since you called from the hospital," the professor said. "A Mrs. Gonzalez called. She's apparently the mother of one of Irving's classmates. She complained that Irving had been at her house talking to her son—I believe his name is Paco—and that Paco was very much upset. Paco wouldn't tell her what Irving and he had been talking about and when Irving left, Paco locked himself in his room. She wanted to know if we could tell her what had disturbed her son. Of course we could not. But the call indicated that Irving made one or more stops on his way home. So, you see, there is nothing to worry about."

"I hope you're not overoptimistic, Professor," said Dr. Coffee. "Could you tell us the names of some of your son's other school friends?"

"I'm afraid not," said the professor's wife, suddenly alert to the situation. "Irving never brought them home."

"I can name four," Max Ritter volunteered. "Besides Paco Gonzalez, there's Bill Cox, Hank Werner, and Wally Block. A couple of Saturdays ago I had a day off and I took Jake and his pals to the ball game."

"That's a side of you I never knew." Dr. Coffee smiled briefly. "Do you know where Jake's pals live?"

"Sure. I picked 'em up and took 'em home."

"Could you place their homes in serial order, say between Pasteur Hospital and here?"

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"I guess so. The Cox place is closest to the hospital. Then comes Gonzalez, then Werner, and Block is nearest here."

"Get on the phone, Max, and find out if the boy called on any of his other buddies besides Gonzalez. I got the impression while he was in my lab that he thought I was trying to make him betray his friends—how I don't know."

Ritter disappeared into the next room.

He was back in a few minutes with some notes scribbled on an envelope.

"I talked to Mrs. Cox," he reported. "She says Jake—par'me, Esther, Irving—came to see Bill about half-past one and the two of them went out to the backyard for a while. She don't know what they talked about but when Bill came in he made a phone call. She thinks it was to some girl because he's not talking about it, like he don't want to be considered a sissy. The Werners and the Blocks, both negative. Neither of them seen him today."

"So it looks as though the boy disappeared somewhere between the Gonzalez place and here, assuming he was coming home. Max, if you put enough men on that stretch right away you might find someone who saw what happened—if anything."

"Will do, Doc."

"Did you call the coroner?"

"I did. He says it's okay for you to do the P.M. If you want him to sign anything he'll come over."

"Then I'll get a bite to eat and run over to the hospital. If Jamaica's body is there, I'll do the autopsy tonight."

When Dr. Coffee walked into his laboratory, Dr. Mookerji and Doris Hudson were sharing sandwiches and a container of milk. A transistor radio was perched on the workbench between them.

"What are you two doing here so late?" Dr. Coffee asked. "Don't you know Pasteur doesn't pay overtime?"

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib," said the Hindu resident. "Have been hearing wireless reports of mysterious fatality in sweet shop. Believing same is perhaps client of Leftenant Ritter, staff is offering services."

"Besides, we were wondering if there was any news of that cute little boy who was here this afternoon," said Doris Hudson.

"The boy hasn't turned up yet." Dr. Coffee shook his head as he took off his jacket and slipped into a white smock. "Has that package from the coroner arrived yet?"

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"Ten minutes ago, Doctor. They phoned from the basement."

"Then I'll accept your offer, Dr. Mookerji. Get our usual impedimenta together—we'll go right down and get to work. You'd better go home, Doris."

"If there's any news about the boy—"

"I'll phone you. Max has his troops mobilized. We're all worried. With reason, I'm afraid. Good night, Doris."

Max Ritter's phone call was transferred to the white-tiled room in the basement of Pasteur Hospital where the mortal remains of Jimmy Jamaica lay on a stainless-steel dissection table. Dr. Coffee had finished his external examination of the naked body and Dr. Mookerji was making notes. There were no wounds apparent.

He was about to make the first incision from the sternum through the navel when the clanger of the telephone bell shattered the solemn silence. Dr. Coffee put down his knife and picked up the instrument.

The boy was still missing, Ritter reported, but there were developments.

Among the fingerprints collected by the police experts from Jimmy Jamaica's place was a set apparently belonging to Maggie Dorwin. The Henry classification was telephoned to the F.B.I. in Washington. Within the hour the identification was made and her record telephoned to Northbank.

"Maggie got busted twice in Chicago," Ritter said. "Shoplifting. She did time and when she got out she came to Northbank. Her sister lives here."

"I suppose that's where Sergeant Kendall was going to look for her," Dr. Coffee suggested.

"She ain't there. I talked to Kendall after I got word from Washington."

"Look, Max. That shoplifting record ties in with all those watches and junk we found this afternoon. Why don't you check with Jake's pals and—"

"Already done, Doc. I talked to the Coxes, and they got Billy out of bed. He admitted Maggie was teaching the kids how to pick pockets, snatch handbags, and steal from stores. They got paid off in candy and gum and once in a while in nickels and dimes. So this afternoon Jake made the rounds of his friends to warn them he's going to blow the whistle on Jimmy and Maggie. When Jake left, Billy Cox phoned Jamaica to put him wise."

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"You think Jamaica sent somebody to intercept Jake while he was making the rounds of his friends?"

"Natch. I think Maggie grabbed him after he left the Cox place. He never got any farther. But we'll find him."

"I hope," said Dr. Coffee, "before—" He did not finish the sentence. That vague feeling of uneasiness came over him again. He looked at the waxen body on the gleaming table. "Max, I'm just starting on Jamaica. It shouldn't take more than two hours. Call me then. Or before, if you have any news of Jake."

When Doctors Coffee and Mookerji returned from the basement with their Mason jars and white enamel containers, Max Ritter was already waiting in the laboratory.

"Doc, what killed Jamaica?"

"Massive hemorrhage," said the pathologist, "and shock."

"Hemorrhage? Why didn't I see any blood?" The detective pushed his hat to the back of his head.

"We found over a quart of blood in the abdominal cavity."

"Hey. How come?"

"He had a ruptured liver—technically a sagittal rupture between the two lobes. The hepatic artery was severed."

"Ain't that a funny way to die?"

"We see a ruptured liver occasionally—in an auto accident, a big fall, or anything that will smash the liver back against the spine. Have you heard from Sergeant Kendall since I spoke to you last?"

A blank expression crossed Ritter's face. He picked up the phone and dialed the police number. He asked to speak to Sergeant Kendall.

When he replaced the receiver his Adam's apple jounced twice.

"Kendall was unexpectedly called outa town," he said, almost without moving his lips. "Seems his father is dying in Chicago."

"Use your own judgment about getting out a warrant for Kendall," said Dr. Coffee, "but a man who can break two one-inch planks with a barehanded karate chop can certainly rupture a man's liver. Jamaica was apparently a heavy drinker. His liver extended several inches below his rib cage. So if our Black Belt karate expert backed him against the wall behind his candy counter—Max, do you want me to give you a hypothetical picture of what must have happened?"

"I'm all ears."

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"Okay. Kendall was on the Pickpocket Squad in Chicago. Maggie Dorwin is a convicted Chicago shoplifter. When they came to Northbank they were not strangers. Here they teamed up with Jamaica and started a sort of Fagin operation."

"What's a Fagin operation?"

"Don't you remember your Charles Dickens, Max? Fagin was the villain in *Oliver Twist* who trained children to be pickpockets. Let's say Maggie was the instructor and Jamaica recruited kids who already showed larcenous tendencies by stealing candy. Only Jake refused to be blackmailed into a life of crime, but he continued to steal candy because of this pathological craving for sweets. Our three-headed Fagin thereupon put pressure on Jake to join the team—first the school principal, then the fond parent, and finally the police in the person of cop-accomplice Sergeant Kendall. Do you follow me?"

"I'm way ahead of you," said Ritter. "Jake decided he had enough, but before he sprung the trap he warned his pals to stand clear if they could. But Billy Cox panicked and spilled to Jamaica—"

"Whereupon Jamaica panicked and called you, expecting to make some sort of deal," Dr. Coffee resumed. "But Sergeant Kendall came in, overheard part of the conversation, and started a fight with Jamaica. Maybe he didn't mean to kill him—you'll probably have a hard time making anything more than manslaughter stick after you catch up with him—but he did give him the karate chop.

"Maggie had been out shopping during this time. She came in during the argument and dropped her groceries when she heard the ruckus reaching a climax. We can assume that Jamaica was putting up some kind of fight by the rapidity with which rigor mortis developed. Maggie rushed downstairs to find Jamaica dead or dying. Kendall sent her out to intercept Jake.

"Then Kendall started to set up an alibi. He locked up the candy store and got you to join him in finding your wayward nephew."

"I bet the juvenile probation people never asked to see the kid at all," said Ritter. "I'll check in the morning."

The phone rang.

"Pathology. Doctor Coffee speaking . . . Yes, he's here. Do you—is that so? . . . Well, that's good news—superlative, in fact . . . You don't say! Certainly, we'll be over."

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Dr. Coffee was grinning as he hung up.

"That was your sister Esther," he said. "The prodigy has returned."

"Jake's back?"

Dr. Coffee nodded. "He just got home—in a taxi."

Irving Liebman, Junior obviously enjoyed being the center of attention. He displayed less emotion (his Oriental blood, no doubt) than his foster parents as he described the afternoon and evening he had spent with Maggie Dorwin at the Riverside Motel.

No, he said, he hadn't been afraid when she asked him to get into her car near the Gonzalez home. He was curious about where she was going to take him and what she might try to do to him. It turned out she wasn't quite sure about these points herself, because she drove around aimlessly for an hour or so, as if she couldn't make up her mind. Suddenly she said aloud, "The hell with Kendall! I'm just a minor league crook. I'm not a killer or a kidnaper. Why can't I keep on being just a dip and a shoplifter?"

The boy remembered her exact words with the total recall with which he remembered batting averages.

Maggie drove into the parking lot behind a shopping center and locked the boy in the car while she bought some chocolate bars and a bottle of whiskey. She then proceeded to the motel, where she registered, paid in advance, locked them both in the cabin, and hid the key in the bosom of her dress. She then addressed herself to the bottle seeking an answer to her dilemma.

She debated with herself in ringing tones. Should she take the kid to the rendezvous Kendall had designated? Or should she just sit here and hope Kendall wouldn't find her, because he would beat the hell out of her if he did? Or should she call the cops, turn over the kid, and tell them what Kendall did to Jimmy Jamaica, even though that would mean she'd go right back into the pokey?

As the evening wore on and the level in the bottle went steadily down, she reached no decision. Meanwhile she was dozing off for a few seconds at a time, but not enough for Jake to get at her key.

The boy had finally managed to escape by locking himself in the bathroom, standing on the toilet seat, and squeezing through the tiny window.

"How did you pay the taxi?" Dr. Coffee asked. "Would a Northbank cabbie extend credit to a small boy who hailed him in the middle of the night?"

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"Oh, I had money," the boy said. "I showed the driver the ten-dollar bill I borrowed from Maggie."

"You borrowed—?"

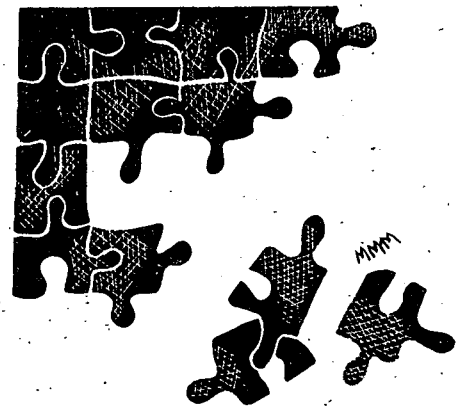
"Well, I took it out of her handbag. I watched her one day when Maggie was, you know, teaching the kids how to open a woman's bag without the woman noticing. It looked easy, and it is. I tried it, and Maggie didn't notice." He turned to Professor Liebman. "If you want to pay it back, sir, you could take it out of my allowance—a quarter a week. I think Maggie is still at the motel. She's in Cabin Six."

She was indeed in Cabin Six when the police arrived—out cold.

In response to a broadcast by Detective Lieutenant Max Ritter of the Northbank Homicide Squad, the New York Police picked up Sergeant Kendall at Kennedy Airport as he boarded a plane for Mexico.

"What I can't understand, Irving," Professor Liebman said to Jake before sending him to bed on the night of the prodigy's return, "is the reason you got into this woman's car so readily, knowing she had been engaging in criminal activities. Why didn't you cry out or run for help? Why?"

"Well," the boy replied, "I thought this was a good chance for me to learn more about crooks, in case like I should decide I wanted to be a detective like Uncle Max."



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Hugh Pentecost

Chambrun Plays It Cool

Here is a story about Pierre Chambrun, resident manager of the Beaumont, the top luxury hotel in New York—a city inside a city, with its own shops, restaurants, night clubs, and police force. Almost anything can happen at the Beaumont—including almost any kind of crime . . .

In this collection we give you not one but two stories by Hugh Pentecost—a slice of Chambrun and a slice of Jericho, with a filling of the first parody-pastiche of Pierre Chambrun (Henri Champoux) and John Jericho (Job Joshua), in the story of their first confrontation as rival detectives.

Don't miss this sleuthian sandwich . . .

Detective: PIERRE CHAMBRUN

He was an attractive kid, a little more formal and polite than most fourteen-year-olds of my acquaintance. I watched him come down the ramp from the cabin of the jetliner at Kennedy Airport. Not many kids of his age fly the Atlantic alone, certainly not with this boy's air of complete sophistication.

But when I thought it over it wasn't so odd. His maternal grandfather, Alistair McRae, the British shipping tycoon, owned private planes, private yachts, private God-knows-what-else. Travel surely was nothing new to young Robert Fairburn, although I understood this was his first trip to New York and to the United States.

He was not very tall, was quite slim, and was wearing gray flannels, a blue blazer, and a matching blue schoolboy's cap. Gold-rimmed glasses gave him an owlish look. He carried a raincoat and a pigskin attaché case. We'd be picking up his luggage after customs.

I stopped him at the gate. "Bobby Fairburn?" I said.

He gave me a puzzled look. "Yes, sir."

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"My name is Mark Haskell," I told him. "I'm meeting you because your father couldn't make it."

"Oh," he said, in a faraway voice. His eyes narrowed behind the glasses as if he felt sudden pain.

"There's nothing wrong," I said. "Nothing important, I mean. Your father was held up on the West Coast and he won't get in till later tonight. I work at the Beaumont Hotel where you and he will be staying. We'll try to keep you entertained until your father gets here."

"Thank you, sir," he said, looking up at me, his eyes steady. "My father hasn't—?"

"He's fine," I said. "No problem."

He took it for granted I knew his story. I did. His mother was Jennifer McRae, daughter of one of the three richest men in the world, a target, fifteen years ago, for every international fortune hunter on both sides of the Atlantic. One of them had won her—Lance Fairburn, a young man of great charm, an enthusiastic polo player, a top golfer, with no discernible means of making a living. Fairburn had persuaded Jennifer to elope with him.

Old man McRae shook the earth trying to break up the marriage but Jennifer stood by her guns. Lance was the man she loved. Why should he have to make a living? Making her happy was enough. Young Bobby was born a year later.

By then the major flaw in Lance Fairburn's makeup was beginning to show. He was a faithful husband, a loving father—and a hopeless alcoholic. According to Pierre Chambrun, my boss and the resident manager of the Beaumont who had known the McRaes for years, Lance Fairburn tried hard, but he simply couldn't lick his drinking problem. After a couple of years Jennifer shut herself and her small son away from Fairburn. Old man McRae closed his pocketbook tight and Lance Fairburn was on his own and broke.

Fairburn, Chambrun had told me, tried his best. He went to some expensive place to take the "cure." Where he got the money for it no one knew, but Chambrun believed Jennifer gave it to him without her father's knowledge. She really loved the guy.

Fairburn came out of a long battle, apparently "clean." He went for a whole year without touching a drop and Jennifer, over her father's protests, took him back. Things went well for a while but gradually Fairburn began to slip—a drink here, two drinks there. Alcoholics can't do that.

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One night he and Jennifer were at a party at someone's house in the British countryside. Fairburn got himself bombed, insisted on driving home, ran into a tree, demolished the car and was thrown free and unharmed himself; but he left his lovely wife paralyzed from the waist down for life. Young Bobby was four years old when that tragedy struck. Only careful surveillance by friends kept Alistair McRae from murdering his son-in-law.

During the next ten years Jennifer and Bobby lived at her father's country estate in Huntingdonshire. Fairburn came to America, wound up on Skid Row, then somehow pulled himself together, sold second-hand cars and second-class products of all sorts, sometimes as a door-to-door salesman. Slowly, torturously from all accounts, he finally licked the drinking problem. He was now selling real estate in California.

A woman who truly loves is a kind of miracle. Bound to a wheel chair, her life destroyed except for Bobby, Jennifer still recognized the things in Fairburn that had attracted her in the first place. She also recognized the need for a father in Bobby's life. Divorced women or widows usually find a new man who can take that place with a child. Jennifer didn't have that option.

But she had ways of getting news about Lance Fairburn and she was finally convinced that, at last, he was clean. It was impossible for Fairburn to come to England to see his son. Old man McRae had never forgiven and would never forget.

So it was arranged for Bobby to come to New York to visit his father. Chambrun, an old friend, was part of the scheme. The boy and his father would have a suite at the Beaumont, paid for by Jennifer. Without ostentation Chambrun would be there to see to it that Fairburn didn't fall off the wagon and make a shambles of his son's visit.

On the way in from the airport in the hotel's limousine Bobby didn't seem to be much interested in the great new city he'd never seen before.

"May I ask what you do at the hotel, sir?" he asked me.

"Public relations," I said. "Publicity, handshaking, overseeing big parties, conventions, fashion shows, what-have-you. I am the perpetual smiler. Your friend, Mr. Chambrun, does the growling."

"I've never met Mr. Chambrun," Bobby said. "Mother says he's nice."

"You'll like him," I said.

We drove on for a way in silence.

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"Do you know my father, sir?" Bobby asked.

"I've never met him," I said, "but I saw him play in a polo match some years ago. He was hell on wheels."

"The thing that's really great about him," the boy said gravely, "is that he's beaten his problem."

That, I thought, was an extraordinarily adult comment from a fourteen-year-old. Some kind of a kid, this owlish boy. Some kind of a mother who had indoctrinated him so well.

Pierre Chambrun is a short square man with bright black eyes buried in deep pouches—eyes that can twinkle with humor or compassion, or when he is angry, turn hard and cold as a hanging judge's. He presides over a private world of his own, the Hotel Beaumont, one of the top luxury hotels in the world. It is like a small city within one building, with its own shops, restaurants, night clubs, cooperatively owned homes, its own hospital, safety-deposit vaults, beauty parlors, ballrooms, bars, even its own police force. And Chambrun is the boss, the king, a man with the uncanny ability to know exactly what is going on everywhere in his domain at all times. Or almost always. When he doesn't it's time for all of us who work for him to take to the bomb shelters.

Chambrun was at his best in the few moments he spent with Bobby Fairburn when I delivered the boy. He had a gift for talking to children on their level without sounding patronizing.

"My mother speaks very warmly of you, sir," the boy said.

"She was just about your age when I first met her," Chambrun said. "She's one of my favorite people. How is she?"

The boy's face took on that pained look I'd seen when he was worried about his father. "It's terribly hard for her," he said. "The wheel chair and all. She's pretty wonderful."

"Please give her my love when you talk to her," Chambrun said. "Which you can do any time you want, you know, by just picking up the phone in your rooms."

"I—I'm not sure I understand why my father isn't here," Bobby said.

"He missed plane connections on the West Coast," Chambrun explained. "He should get here about nine o'clock this evening. You've got about four hours to wait. Would you like to have someone show you the city? Would you like company for dinner here in the hotel?"

"I think I'd like to wait to see the city with my father," Bobby

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said. "Could I—could I have dinner in my room?"

"Of course."

"And is there a color television set? I've seen very little American television."

Chambrun smiled. "Maybe you should leave well enough alone," he said dryly.

I took the boy to his suite and left him there, after showing him how to tune in the color TV. Jennifer Fairburn had reserved one of the most expensive suites in the Beaumont for the boy and her unhappy husband.

I had a million things to do and didn't think much more about young Fairburn. I remember I was having a drink with a fashion designer in the Trapeze Bar, discussing an upcoming show to be held in the Grand Ballroom, when I happened to glance at my watch and saw that it was a little after nine. I remember thinking the boy and his father must be reunited by now.

I was about 9:45 when I was called to the phone in the Trapeze. It was Chambrun.

"Lance Fairburn is here," Chambrun said, "but the boy doesn't seem to be in his suite. Do you know where he is, Mark?"

"Haven't the foggiest," I said.

"Well, locate him," Chambrun said, and the phone clicked off.

A quick series of inquiries produced no results. The night bell captain hadn't seen him. Jerry Dodd, our security chief, had no word on him—they hadn't been on the lookout for the boy. I checked with Room Service and learned that Bobby had ordered dinner about 6:30.

I went up to the suite and let myself in with a passkey. The dinner table was set up. Bobby had ordered a shell steak, a mixed green salad, rolls and butter, ice cream, and a glass of milk. He'd hardly touched the dinner—the ice cream was almost melted. I had the notion he'd left just after he had started to eat. The television set was on, tuned to some war film. I switched it off and headed for Chambrun's office.

Lance Fairburn was a tall, wiry, dark man, with lines of dissipation at the corners of his mouth and eyes. He must have been extraordinarily handsome when he was a young man. He looked at me with brown eyes that were like a stricken animal's.

"I guess he decided to run out on me," Fairburn said, when I'd

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reported. "I'd hoped it would work, but—"

Chambrun was at his desk, smoking one of his Egyptian cigarettes, his eyes narrowed. "I'd have sworn he was looking forward eagerly to seeing you," he said.

Fairburn glanced at the sideboard which was well stocked with liquor. I thought how close the alcoholic always is to the brink of disaster. A light flashed on one of Chambrun's telephones.

"They've probably found him," Chambrun said. He switched the button on the squawk box so that we could all hear the call. It was Mrs. Kiley, the hotel's night switchboard chief.

"An overseas call for you, Mr. Chambrun."

"Put it through," Chambrun said. He glanced at Fairburn. "The boy probably called his mother."

"Overseas Operator Number Eight," a woman's voice said. "Mr. Chambrun?"

"Speaking."

"One moment, please."

Then a man's voice, loud and angry. "Chambrun? Alistair McRae here. You know what's happened to Bobby?"

"Happened to him?"

"He's been kidnaped!" McRae shouted. "They demand a million in ransom money. Has Fairburn showed up?"

"He's here in my office," Chambrun said. "He can hear what you're saying."

The angry voice rose. "So help me, Fairburn, I'll kill you for this. That's a promise."

Fairburn stared at the squawk box, his face the color of ashes.

"Chambrun?"

"I'm here," Chambrun said. His voice had a flat metallic sound.

"My instructions are to have the money delivered to you as soon as the banks are open in the morning," McRae said. "They will then contact you directly and instruct you how to pay it."

"The police—the F.B.I.?" Chambrun asked.

"No! I won't run any risks." The voice shook. "Listen to me, Fairburn. I should have known you'd take this opportunity to feather your nest. When you return Bobby I'll have you hunted down wherever you're hiding."

"I swear to God I don't know what this is all about," Fairburn said.

"You'll get the money, but don't count on spending it," McRae said. "Chambrun?"

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"Yes."

"Jennifer doesn't know yet what's happened to her boy. Don't call her. It would be too much for her to take. When Bobby is safe, then she can know. And Chambrun?"

"Yes?"

"For God's sake play it cool. Do whatever they ask."

"Count on it," Chambrun said.

The phone clicked off. The room was so silent it hurt. Fairburn moistened his lips as if he meant to speak, but Chambrun's cold black eyes seemed to pin him to silence. I tried to imagine how it had all come about—the endless fight against his alcoholism, the hopeless attempt to get solidly on his feet, the constant hostility from old McRae when what Fairburn needed was help.

This situation in which he was supposed to make a new contact with his son had provided him with an opportunity to get himself financially secure and, at the same time, revenge himself on McRae. He must have felt that nothing he could work out with Bobby would really be important. McRae would break it down in the long run. This way the boy wouldn't be harmed and Fairburn would have a million bucks—if he could escape the life-long manhunt that McRae would set in motion. It was the desperate act of a desperate man.

"He's mad!" Fairburn whispered. "I wouldn't hurt Bobby. My God, more than anything else I hoped I could get to be a father again."

"How did you happen to miss your plane connection on the coast?" Chambrun asked.

"I didn't miss it," Fairburn said. "I was bumped off the flight."

"Bumped?"

"Some VIP. State Department, they hinted. I begged them to take someone else off the flight because I had a young son waiting for me at this end. Why did they have to choose me? They were very polite, but no dice. I had to wait until the next flight."

"It can be checked," Chambrun said.

"Of course."

"I suggest you came on an earlier flight, got to the boy shortly before seven, persuaded him to go somewhere with you, then showed up at nine and reported him missing."

"No! You can check out the flight I came on."

"I will," Chambrun said. He glanced at his wrist watch. "We have nearly twelve hours to wait before the money can be deliv-

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ered by the bank and I get instructions. Do you guarantee the boy will be safe?"

"For God's sake listen to me!" Fairburn said, his voice ragged. "I swear to you I know nothing about this. I wanted this reconciliation to work. I—I love Jennifer. I dream that somehow, sometime, we can get together again. I owe her my life, God knows. The last thing in the world that would make any sense would be for me to try to gouge McRae. He's a killer, and he would never give up, just as he says. What I've told you is true. I was bumped off the plane. When I got here Bobby was gone. You've got to believe me!"

"It's not a bad gamble," Chambrun said, his voice cold. "I'd say you have a fifty-fifty chance of getting away with the money and escaping from McRae. You've had time to plan it in detail."

"Oh, God!" Fairburn said, and covered his face with his hands.

"Is somebody with the boy?" Chambrun asked. "Or do you have to get back to him?"

Fairburn just turned his head from side to side without answering.

"You are at liberty to stay in the suite that was reserved for you," Chambrun said. "By the way, what was the airline that bumped you off its plane?"

"Northern International," Fairburn said.

Chambrun put out his cigarette in the mother-of-pearl ashtray on his desk. "So now we have nothing to do but wait for instructions from the kidnapers. I suggest you report here at nine sharp in the morning, Fairburn. The money should be arriving from the bank shortly after that."

The minute Fairburn had walked unsteadily out of the office, Chambrun turned active. He picked up the phone and instructed Mrs. Kiley, the night supervisor on the switchboard, to monitor all incoming and outgoing calls to and from Suite 9D. Then he turned to me.

"Call Northern International and try to get a confirmation of Fairburn's story."

Then he asked Mrs. Kiley to locate Jerry Dodd, our head security officer, and have him come to the office at once.

I went down to our travel office to do my phoning. It took me about half an hour to come up with a report. Northern International had no record of anyone having been bumped off a plane in Los Angeles. Their passenger lists showed that a Lance Fairburn

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had presumably been on a plane that would have landed him in New York in time to meet Bobby's plane at Kennedy. So much for Fairburn's story.

I went to report to Chambrun and found Jerry Dodd with him. Jerry is a slim, dark, hard little man with the brightest eyes you've ever seen. He is a first-class man and one of the two or three people on the hotel staff that Chambrun found indispensable. I delivered my information along with a Northern International flight schedule, and neither Chambrun nor Jerry seemed surprised.

"It's not hard to figure what the next move will be," Jerry said. "The money will be here a few minutes after nine in the morning. You'll be told that Fairburn has been designated to hand it over to the kidnapers."

"I give it to him and he walks away with a million dollars," Chambrun said.

"It sounds like a remarkably easy way to get rich quick," I said. "Bobby would go anywhere with him, wait anywhere for him. He doesn't have to hold the boy, in the usual sense. In the morning he collects the dough, and when Bobby gets tired of waiting for him he comes back here for help."

"Like rolling off a log," Jerry said. "The kid, without realizing it, is a willing ally. I wonder what kind of story Fairburn gave him to persuade him they shouldn't be staying here at the Beaumont?"

Chambrun's eyes were narrowed against the smoke from his cigarette. He didn't seem to have heard either of us.

I made my nightly rounds of the hotel, checking on the way with all the staff members as to whether or not they'd seen Bobby leaving the hotel with anyone. No one had.

I went to bed about two o'clock. Shortly after eight I was shaved, showered, and dressed, had taken two bites of breakfast, and reported to Chambrun's office. Chambrun and Jerry were both there ahead of me. I thought Chambrun looked tired, as if he'd had very little sleep. It seemed Alistair McRae's secretary had called him several times during the night to find out if there was any news.

"A half year of my salary in phone calls," Jerry said. "The old man is naturally out of his mind. What will he say to his daughter if things go wrong?"

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"They won't go wrong," Chambrun said grimly.

"Fairburn's been sitting tight," Jerry said. "He hasn't moved out of 9D. Room Service brought him breakfast. No phone calls in or out, not a single one."

At a few minutes before nine Fairburn, fishbelly pale, turned up. I guessed he hadn't slept at all. I also guessed that he'd managed, somehow, to stay off liquor. Well, he had a delicate situation to handle, and once he'd pulled it off he could afford to drink the well dry.

"Anything?" he asked Chambrun.

"Nothing."

At 9:04 the phone rang. It was the Midland Bank informing Chambrun that the million dollars were on its way. Fifteen minutes later two armed bank guards appeared with the ransom money in a black attaché case. Chambrun signed for it and the guards left. Only seconds later the phone rang again. Chambrun switched on the squawk box so we could all hear.

"Chambrun?" a muffled-sounding voice asked.

"Speaking."

"You have just received the money. Right?"

"Right."

"You will deliver it to Fairburn."

There it was—the order we'd anticipated.

"And—?" Chambrun asked, in a cold flat voice.

"He knows where to bring it. Don't have him followed or the boy will pay for your stupidity."

"Wait!" Fairburn cried out. "Where do I take the money?"

The voice laughed. "No point in playing games any more, Lance. You know where."

"But I don't! What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Bring it here," the voice said, and the phone clicked off.

Fairburn's eyes were wide, glassy-looking. "I tell you I haven't the faintest idea where to take the money!"

"Voice sound familiar to you?" Chambrun asked.

"No!"

"Speaking through a handkerchief or a towel," Jerry said. His black eyes were angry. "So there's your money, Fairburn. You better take it and get out of here. And I wish you luck, all bad."

"But *where* do I take it? What do I do with it?" Fairburn was sweating in spite of the air-conditioned coolness of the office. "This is a nightmare."

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"You missed your calling, Dad," Jerry said. "You should have been an actor."

Chambrun was staring fixedly at Fairburn. "If you really don't know where to take the money," he said, "I have a suggestion to make."

"What? Please tell me."

"Take the attaché case, go down to the lobby, sit in one of the big chairs. Put the attaché case down beside you without hanging onto it. If you're not lying, Fairburn, someone will come and pick it up. Let him take it. And let him leave."

"You think—?"

"I think—if you're not lying—that's what will happen," Chambrun said. "I think he may wait a while to make sure you aren't going to leave the hotel."

"What the hell are you talking about, boss?" Jerry said, his eyes popping. "There's nobody else. We know that."

"Oh, there's somebody else," Chambrun said. I couldn't remember ever seeing him so coldly angry. "Go, Fairburn. Let the pickup man take the attaché case. Don't try to stop him. Now!"

Fairburn, like a man in a trance, took the attaché case and walked out of the office.

"You blown your stack or something, boss?" Jerry said.

"No time to talk," Chambrun said. "Mark, go out onto the mezzanine and watch what happens. Jerry, go down to the lobby and watch. If someone takes the case let him get a little away from Fairburn, then nab him. We don't have any authority outside the hotel, so don't let him get past you. Take him for theft."

"But won't that put the boy behind the eight ball?" Jerry asked.

"I hope not," Chambrun said. "Now get moving, both of you, or we'll blow the whole ball game."

The mezzanine is a balcony that runs around the lobby at what would be the second-floor level. There was a door to it just outside Chambrun's office. I went out onto the balcony and stood looking down at the busy lobby. After a moment or two I saw Fairburn come out of one of the elevators and move uncertainly toward the center of things, looking around for an empty chair. He found one and sat down. He put the attaché case on the floor beside him. He sat back in the chair, gripping the arms.

Nothing happened. Five minutes went by. Ten. I was straining to see if someone in the lobby was watching Fairburn. I couldn't

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spot anyone who looked in the least suspicious.

And then, when I had convinced myself that whatever Chambrun expected to happen wasn't going to, a man came through the revolving door from the side-street entrance. He was a small dark man wearing a black felt hat with the brim pulled down. He was wearing gloves. He stopped just inside the door and looked around. He saw Fairburn. He kept staring at him for a few moments, then appeared to be looking around the lobby, trying to guess if there was some kind of trap. Then he walked briskly past Fairburn who paid no attention to him, turned, came slowly back. Almost without stopping he bent down and picked up the attaché case.

He had gone about five steps with it when he found himself facing Jerry Dodd. I couldn't hear what was said, of course, but the man made a quick move to get by. But Jerry quickly had him by the arm. The man dropped the attaché case, there was a momentary tussle, then I saw a gun in the man's hand.

I shouted to Jerry, but I doubt if he heard me. He didn't need to. Jerry can handle himself. I saw the gun spin away across the marble floor, and Jerry's hand came down in a chopping blow on the man's neck. The man went down as if he'd been hit by a sledgehammer.

I ran back along the balcony and down the stairs to the lobby. I was just in time to see the man being helped by Jerry and Johnny Thacker, the bell captain, into the office behind the front desk. It had all happened so quickly I think most of the people in the lobby thought the man had taken ill.

Fairburn still sat, rigidly straight, in the lobby chair. When he saw me he got up unsteadily and followed me into the office.

Chambrun was there, his eyes buried cold and deep in their pouches. Jerry and Johnny had put the man down in an armchair. He was coming to, touching his neck in a gingerly fashion.

"Search him," Chambrun said. "I'm particularly interested in a room key."

Jerry, looking as though he thought Chambrun was out of his mind, went through the man's pockets. He came up with a room key—the tag attached showed it was for Room 912, on the same floor as the suite that had been reserved for Fairburn.

"Call the police, Jerry," Chambrun said. "Have this man held for theft of the attaché case. Have the case locked up in the office

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safe." He turned to Fairburn. "My apologies for not having believed you, Mr. Fairburn."

Fairburn moistened his lips. "Bobby?" he said.

"He is, I hope, in Room 912," Chambrun said. "Mark, I'll need you as a witness. And Bobby will need you, Fairburn."

Chambrun didn't say anything more. We went out to the elevators and took a car up to the ninth floor. Outside the door Chambrun hesitated, then he put the key we'd taken from the bag snatcher into the lock and opened the door. Standing across the room from us was Bobby. Fairburn started toward his son, but the boy turned away, his face working. Fairburn looked at us helplessly, then he said, "Are you all right, Bobby?"

Bobby nodded his head, but he still didn't speak.

"Whatever they told you, Bobby," Chambrun said, very quietly, "isn't true. Your father never planned to kidnap you and rob your grandfather. That's what they told you, isn't it, boy? You were to stay here until they proved your father's guilt? Is that the way it was?"

"Bobby, before God—" Fairburn said. He was at the boy's side, kneeling beside him. "Bobby, Bobby!"

"I thought you were coming to work things out," the boy said.

"I was, Bobby! I did come here for that."

"But you didn't come. You—"

He stopped because there was the sound of a key being turned in the door. It opened and a huge gray-haired man in a tweed suit burst into the room.

"Bobby!" he cried out. He reached Fairburn and pushed him roughly aside. He put his arms around the boy and held him close. Then he turned to Chambrun. "You caught him at it, Chambrun! Good work. I don't know how you managed, but I'll be indebted to you for the rest of my life. Have you called the police?"

"Not yet," Chambrun said. "It may not be a police matter unless your daughter chooses to bring charges, McRae."

So this was Alistair McRae.

"Jennifer will bring charges," McRae said. "And if she decides to go soft on this devil again, I promise I'll bring charges."

"That would be rather a unique situation," Chambrun said, "a man bringing charges against himself."

McRae's bushy black eyebrows drew together. "What are you talking about, Chambrun?"

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"How did you happen to get to this room?" Chambrun asked.

"There was a message for me when I arrived from London," McRae said. "A letter with this room key in it. The letter said I would find Bobby here after ten o'clock."

"You have that letter with you?"

"I was too anxious to get here. I just took the key and rushed here."

Chambrun drew a deep breath. "Your kind of wealth and your kind of power can be used ruthlessly, McRae," he said. "You can buy anything you want. I tried to call you in the middle of the night because I half believed Fairburn's story. Your confidential secretary in London told me you weren't there and she didn't know where you were. So I tried to check with Overseas Operator Number Eight to find out where your call to me earlier had come from. There is no Operator Number Eight. Did you bribe one of your secretaries to impersonate an overseas operator, just the way you bribed that poor fool we have downstairs who was supposed to collect the money from Fairburn and return it to you?"

McRae let go of the boy and stood up, straight and tall.

"Fairburn claimed he was bumped off his plane on the coast to make room for some VIP. We checked. Mark got the report that no such incident had taken place. So I decided that Fairburn was lying—until I looked at the Northern International flight schedule that Mark brought me. It seems, McRae, that you are chairman of Northern International's Board of Directors. So it was no problem for you to have Fairburn bumped off his plane. I suppose you explained to the airline people that there was some supersecret government business involved and that they should falsify their report if anyone inquired about the bumping. With your wealth and your power anything can be accomplished—almost anything."

"Oh, God!" Fairburn said.

"Then you overplayed your hand when you made the phone call instructing us what to do with the money," Chambrun said. "You were too eager to involve Fairburn. 'No point in playing games any more, Lance. You know where to bring the money.' The one thing Fairburn didn't need to pull this off, McRae, was a confederate, someone with whom he'd have to share the money and who'd have something on him for the rest of his life. You overplayed, McRae. You overconvinced me. That's when I started putting the pieces together."

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"You'll need proof of this fairy tale," McRae said.

"I don't need to prove it legally," Chambrun said. "When I tell Jennifer what's happened here she'll believe me—because she knows you, McRae. Because she knows you hate Fairburn so much you'd do anything on earth to keep him from getting together with her and Bobby again. Because she knows that when you want something no ethical or moral considerations stand in your way. If she wants to bring a legal action against you I'll provide her with the proof she needs, but I think she'll just want you to let her and her husband and her son alone. And she's got enough on you now to make it stick."

The big gray man seemed to shrink inside his clothes. I was dumfounded to see two great tears run down his weathered face.

Chambrun turned to Bobby. "It's a curious thing, Bobby, but whatever your grandfather did was done because he loves your mother so very much and because he loves you. His difficulty is that he also hates too much, that he has no compassion for other people's problems. Maybe he'll find some way to make this up to you and your father. Meanwhile, I think your mother would like it if you and your father tried to start your visit together over again."

The boy looked at Lance Fairburn, and then he held out his hand.

Chambrun turned to me. "All right, Mark," he said. "We're already half a day behind in the business of running a hotel."

"Q"

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Jon L. Breen

Champoux versus Joshua

So far as we know, this is the first parody-pastiche written about characters created by Hugh Pentecost, and it's a double-edged double-header. Meet Henri Champoux (p-p version of Pierre Chambrun) and Job Joshua (p-p version of John Jericho), matching wits and personalities in the Hotel Bellweather (p-p version of the Hotel Beaumont), with the parody painted in broad strokes and the pastiche penciled in subtle touches . . . The BAH were holding their annual banquet and costume ball, and one of the courses on the menu was mutton soup à la L.B.

Jon L. Breen scores again! . . .

"For the last time," Henri Champoux barked into the telephone, "I will not have my hotel turned into a shooting gallery!"

As he slammed down the telephone he looked up to see me enter his plush office, a tasteful combination of the exotic and the mundane. As resident manager of the Hotel Bellweather, the world's largest and finest luxury hotel, Champoux must deal with many problems and many people simultaneously, but he prides himself on always knowing what's going on in his hotel. He gave me a curt nod.

"They're at it again, Mart," he said, his black eyes flashing. "I'd have thought the shooting-gallery business was somewhat less prosperous than the incessant offers of these entrepreneurs would suggest. I have just been offered three million dollars to leave the Bellweather, on the theory that since this place couldn't run without me the owners would instantly sell out to the shooting-gallery interests. But there are more pressing matters at hand. Mart, you know Mr. Douglas Gooder?"

"Of course I do," I said, shaking hands with a crew-cut, athletic-looking man in his early fifties. Naturally I knew Doug Gooder—he was the chairman of BAH (Bleeding American

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Hearts), the philanthropic organization that was having its annual banquet and costume ball in the Bellweather that evening. As director of public relations for the hotel, I had seen a lot of Gooder in the past few days.

"There are some problems about the menu for this evening's banquet, Mart," Champoux said.

"That's unfortunate," I said. "But not really my department, is it?"

"I'd like to know just whose department it is," Champoux said, through clenched teeth, keeping his anger in check. "Usually the banquet menu is left to the hotel staff, but I have just heard from the kitchen that representatives of BAH are demanding that mutton soup be part of the bill of fare for this evening's banquet. I have asked Mr. Gooder who ordered the mutton soup and he is unable to enlighten me."

"I don't know," Doug Gooder said. "As I hope you'll understand, gentlemen, the members of the BAH board are all very rich, and some are very eccentric. Any of them could have ordered the mutton soup on BAH stationery, using my signature stamp. I would hate to offend one of them by denying him a dish that was a particular favorite. Of course, if your kitchens are incapable of preparing mutton soup—"

"The kitchens of the Bellweather can prepare anything," Champoux snapped. "The very thought of mutton soup makes my head chef ill, but if it's mutton soup you want, it's mutton soup you'll get. We may not agree with what you eat, but we will defend to the death your right to eat it. But doesn't mutton soup have a certain special significance, Mart?"

I thought about it. "I don't know, sir. It's not one of my favorite dishes, but I don't know of any special significance."

The prodigious bags under Champoux's eyes equipped him well to look disdainful. But he merely said, "Perhaps my fears on that score are groundless. Nonetheless, I've instructed the security force to watch very closely anyone who appears at tonight's costume ball carrying an ax. There is another matter that is more likely to be serious."

While I was puzzling over what an ax had to do with mutton soup, Champoux passed me a scrap of paper on which the following message was written in undistinctive block capitals: DEATH TO THE LAST OF THE TRIBE.

"Does that mean anything to you, Mart?"

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"It looks like a threat, sir."

"Marvelous!" Champoux was at his most sarcastic today. "Any idea at whom the threat could be directed?"

"Well, it could be directed at someone who'll be at the ball tonight: Perhaps someone who will come dressed as an American Indian."

"Do you know of anyone who will come dressed as an American Indian tonight?" Champoux asked Doug Gooder.

"No, not offhand. But most of the costumes will be a surprise. I only know what a few people will be wearing. The artist Job Joshua will come as Paul Bunyan—"

"Paul Bunyan!"

"Yes."

"Paul Bunyan always carries an ax, doesn't he?"

"Well, he was a woodsman. Yes, I guess he does."

"Mart, tell security I want all American Indians watched; I want all axes and all exits watched; and I would appreciate seeing this Job Joshua in my office as soon as he appears in the hotel. What do you know about him, by the way?"

"He was written up in *Life* magazine recently, Chief. He's apparently quite a controversial figure in the world of art. Some say he's too didactic, but others point to his wild use of color and—"

"Enough art criticism. Will he be hard to spot in a crowd?"

"No, they say he's six-six and weighs two hundred and seventy-five pounds."

"Then even you should be able to find him," Champoux said, grimacing.

"Mr. Champoux," said Doug Gooder, "there's one other possibility about the meaning of the term 'last of the tribe'."

"Yes?"

"My son, Doug, Junior. He is a believer in Zero Population Growth and has vowed to have no children. I have no other sons, and my brothers have no heirs. Thus, my son could be the last of the Gooders—the last of the tribe, so to speak."

Job Joshua was a giant of a man, broad and beefy and red-bearded. He entered the lobby of the Bellweather in the costume of a woodsman, with a red-checkered shirt and high boots and an ax slung across his shoulder. As he entered, all eyes in the room turned to look at him. He was used to that and had come to expect it. Tonight he felt the Paul Bunyan costume somehow re-

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duced his stature. Only friendship with a female member of the BAH ball committee had made him agree to attend the costume party at all.

He passed a long-haired youth and his vapid-looking girl friend in the lobby. Since they were wearing the scanty loincloths of Tarzan and Jane, yet hadn't been rejected, he deduced that they, too, were guests at the ball. As he passed he heard the young man, a notably scrawny Tarzan, say, "He isn't really larger than life . . ." The rest was lost, but Job Joshua had heard enough. He cursed to himself. He'd disappointed them because of this ridiculous Paul Bunyan costume. The greatest artist in America shouldn't be making a fool of himself this way.

In Champoux's office I witnessed a battle of giants.

"It's me they're really after, you know," said Job Joshua.

"It is?" said Champoux, raising a black eyebrow. I guess he thought Joshua, with his ax, looked more like a threat than a victim.

"I am the last of the tribe," said Joshua simply. "The last individual. I say what I think and paint what I think. I ask no quarter and give none."

"There's the matter of the mutton soup, Mr. Joshua. Do you know why I associate that with axes?"

"Sure," said Joshua. "Lizzie Borden. That was what they had for breakfast in the Borden household the day her parents were chopped up. Cold mutton soup."

"It was hot mutton soup and I think the housekeeper did it," said Champoux. "But that's beside the point. There's death in the air here. Someone on the BAH board—we haven't been able to find out who—ordered mutton soup for tonight's banquet. And there is also this death threat."

"One of my best paintings—it won a prize last year—was called 'Lizzie Borden'," Joshua said. "It was one of my most eloquent statements against violence. The painting symbolizes how children kill their parents in our society and how the parents kill them back."

"It doesn't sound very subtle."

"Subtlety is not my bag, man. I paint to please myself, not some mealy-mouthed critic. But I am so nonviolent that everywhere I turn, people want to do violence to me. I'm glad I've got this woodsman's ax for self-protection tonight."

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There were other problems in the Bellweather that day, among them a call from a Scandinavian sea captain who claimed one of his sailors, a man named Sorensen, had jumped ship, telling a shipmate he was headed for the Bellweather. Given the man's description and probable low financial status, it seemed unlikely. There were also the usual ledge-walkers talking suicide, Peeping Toms reported prowling among the penthouses, and the other day-to-day problems of a great hotel, but none as worrisome as the "affair of the mutton soup."

I spent part of the day looking into the members of the BAH board. They were an odd lot: Mrs. Ambledon Finch, the eccentric multi-millionaire mongrel-breeder; Sime Grantland, the crusading Broadway gossip columnist; Whitney Organdy, the art critic; and Dave Slush, the TV personality. I couldn't see why any of them should have it in for young Gooder. Critic Whitney Organdy was an outspoken foe of Job Joshua's art of social conscience, but that seemed more a motive for Joshua killing the critic than the reverse.

No American Indians were in evidence when the costumed guests began streaming into the ballroom that evening.

The closest thing there was a rather undersized Tarzan—Doug Gooder, Jr. The girl with him, as Jane, had my favorite costume for the evening, not for the intrinsic merit of the costume, but for what it failed to cover.

The banquet part of the evening went smoothly enough. The mutton soup, in fact, was not bad at all. Like Champoux and the members of the Bellweather security staff, I spent a lot of my time looking around at the various guests, searching for axes. But I saw none. Surely members of the board had no more opportunity to conceal such a weapon than did Tarzan and Jane.

Doug Gooder, Sr., apparently trying to win points with his son, came as Bob Dylan; Mrs. Finch came as a St. Bernard; Sime Grantland as a circus strongman; Whitney Organdy as Esther Williams; and Dave Slush as Uriah Heep. The nervous security men had asked Joshua to check his ax, but Joshua refused, though he promised to keep a tight hold on it.

After the banquet I stood in a corner of the Grand Ballroom, trying to keep as many of the principals in sight as I could. Dressed as an ostrich, I was fairly inconspicuous. At certain moments I was able to conceal myself from view by sticking my head into the punchbowl.

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An ostrich costume makes drinking difficult, so I was perhaps the only sober person in the room when one of the security men rushed over to tell me that a dead man had been found in the men's room.

It proved to be Doug Gooder, Sr., and he had been hacked to death with an ax.

Henri Champoux was livid. "Why was this allowed to happen, Mart?" he demanded.

"I was watching all of them, Chief."

"You obviously weren't watching Gooder."

"Well, I couldn't watch them all at once."

"Where is Joshua?"

"He disappeared during the evening with young Gooder's girl friend."

Job Joshua awoke in a laundry closet with a crushing headache. His head throbbed as only a mighty artist's head could. But he took action immediately, as his war and peace experiences had taught him to do. He raised his ax and hacked down the door of the closet. Even the nonviolent can get angry, and Job Joshua was angry enough to hack to bits a whole forest.

That girl. Young Gooder's girl. She'd said she was in trouble, had persuaded him to follow her and help her. He was always willing, eager even, to help someone in trouble, especially a young woman. But he'd been ambushed as soon as he'd cleared the crowd in the ballroom.

Storming into the ballroom, he was greeted by a hush, and then by female screams.

"That's him!" someone screamed. "That's the one I saw coming out of the men's room!"

Quickly surrounded by police and security men, Joshua looked down at his ax for the first time.

It was covered with blood.

"I can at least be thankful," said Henri Champoux in his office, "that my hotel has not been turned into a shooting gallery. A gory bullring perhaps, but not a shooting gallery."

I sat in silence, still amazed by the escape of Joshua. We were awaiting the hospital report on the wounded. Job had swung his ax like a madman and escaped from the hotel despite the efforts of a hundred of New York's finest.

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"He can't get far," Champoux said philosophically. "A man in a Paul Bunyan suit really stands out in a crowd. They'll bring him in."

The members of the BAH Board of Directors were present at the sad post-mortem, but without their chairman they seemed rudderless.

After a moment's silence Champoux asked tentatively, "Will this unfortunate evening adversely affect the Bellweather's chances when the time comes to select next year's site? You can hardly think the Bellweather is at fault."

"There must be something about this place," Sime Grantland reflected. "Thirty-five murders since 1960."

Champoux did not dignify that with an answer. He merely said, "These are the black days."

Behind him his office window shattered and two struggling figures fell into the room.

I could only gape. Two Paul Bunyans! Two axes! Two Job Joshuas in mortal combat!

Only one rose, his ax triumphant.

"That's marvelous!" cried Dave Slush. "That's just fantastic! What's your definition of love?"

As Job Joshua explained, Henri Champoux sat in stony silence, embarrassed at seeing someone else solve a murder in his very office.

"That man lying on the floor is named Sven Sorensen. He's a Scandinavian sailor. He was hired to impersonate me and hack up Doug Gooder tonight. He was hired by Doug Gooder, Junior, whom I have delivered into the custody of the New York police. Doug Gooder's girl friend was used as a decoy, to lure me away from the ball—not with her natural charms, I might add, but with a spurious plea for help.

"I was knocked unconscious and locked in a laundry closet while Sorensen committed the crime, and then the bloody ax was thrown in there with me, substituted for my own. A clever frameup. The mutton soup was another factor that was supposed to throw suspicion on me, because of my Lizzie Borden painting.

"I should have known when I first saw young Gooder and his girl friend in the lobby. They were discussing me. They wanted to be sure that the impersonator they chose matched me physically. When I heard young Gooder say, 'He isn't really larger than life,'

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I didn't hear the whole sentence. What he meant was that I'm not physically larger than *Life* magazine said I am in that write-up they did on me a few weeks ago. They were getting jittery—afraid the sailor they hired might be too small for the job. Physically, he wasn't, but mentally and spiritually he didn't measure up. Or artistically, I might add. I should have caught onto this at once, since as you all can see I *am* larger than life in the true sense.

"Young Gooder killed him for the inheritance, of course. But in a deeper sense Doug Gooder, Senior, committed suicide. He caused his own death by disillusioning his son with the corrupted values of the older generation. I personally think Junior should be given another chance. The two broken arms and legs I gave him tonight should be punishment enough.

"Now if you gentlemen will excuse me, I will go back to Greenwich Village and paint. All this naked violence has made me a little sick."

Champoux sat on in silence, but I saw a loose end.

"What about the note that said DEATH TO THE LAST OF THE TRIBE? What did that mean? What tribe was Gooder the last of?"

Joshua stared hard at Champoux, then said, "Maybe you'd like to explain that one, Champoux. Or should I?"

Champoux said nothing.

Joshua turned to me. "Be careful. That's all I can tell you. You're the last of the tribe."

"I am?" I gaped. "The last of what tribe?"

"The Watson Tribe. Guys like me and Champoux who attract murder and other crimes sometimes have other guys following us around, writing down everything we say, and expressing wonder and amazement at our most elementary deductions. It can get to be a real drag after a while. I have a Watson, too, but I lose mine every chance I get. The business of being a larger-than-life superman is a loner's game. You, sir, are the last one left. The last Watson. Or near enough.

"I don't know who the author of that threat is, but it may be one Henri Champoux. Watch your step. If you need any help, just ask for me around the Village. I can usually be found painting my heart out against violence."

Job Joshua picked up his ax and strutted out into the night.

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Hugh Pentecost

Jericho Plays It Cool

The second half of the Pentecost sandwich . . . John Jericho, that red-bearded, red-haired Viking of a man, devotes his life and enormous energies to painting and fighting—painting to reveal the senseless violence in the world, fighting to help the underdog, the oppressed, the "little people" of the world. Wherever Jericho goes, he meets or is met by crime. Usually there is a mystery to be solved; this time there's something more—an impossible mystery to be solved. Not a locked-room puzzle or a gimmicked miracle problem—nothing like that. Here he has to solve the faith of a woman who knows, despite the overwhelming evidence against her faith, that her man could not have done what he was supposed to have done . . .

Detective: JOHN JERICHO

John Jericho, the crusading artist, is not often to be found in his studio on Jefferson Mews in New York's Greenwich Village. He uses the studio largely as a storage place for paintings, materials, and clothes. Most of his time is spent traveling around the world painting, almost invariably scenes of violence, in a personal outcry against man's inhumanity to man.

Jericho is a huge man, standing almost six feet four inches tall and weighing 240 pounds, of solid bone and muscle. His hair and beard are a flaming red, and he reminds one of an old Viking warrior. His life has been devoted to exposing injustice and fighting for the little man in a world where power structures and special privileges ignore individual rights and freedoms.

This may explain how Jericho became involved in the death of Jimmy Kane. It was partly accidental because Jericho was spending a rare few days in the Jefferson Mews studio. If he had been away he would never have met the girl, and if he hadn't met her he would have read about Jimmy Kane's death, been distressed by it, and filed away his memories of Jimmy in the category of

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human tragedies. The suicide of a young man is sad, tragic, but there is nothing you can do about it after the fact.

Jimmy Kane had grown up in the Village area of the city, only a few blocks from Jefferson Mews. He had faced all the problems of poverty while trying to survive in a huge city. By the time he reached high school Jimmy had become a fine athlete, starring in football and basketball. His special talent, however, was boxing. Before he was 20 he had been taken on by a professional manager, had fought a dozen fights in the small-club circuit, and begun to gain a reputation by knocking out a few seasoned professionals on the fringe of the big time.

He was beginning to earn good money when Jake Slattery, the number one challenger for the heavyweight crown, inadvisedly agreed to fight Kane in what was advertised as a warm-up for Slattery prior to his fight with the champion. Jimmy cut Slattery to pieces and was suddenly a headline maker. The champion was reluctant to face this new challenger, using the excuse that Jimmy was still not well enough known to attract the big money of a Madison Square Garden fight and closed-circuit TV. Jimmy proceeded to rectify this situation by knocking out two other top-ranked contenders.

But the end to his big dream came about in a most unlikely fashion. Jimmy was working out with a sparring partner in a neighborhood gym when he slipped on a wet spot in the ring, fell, and struck his head against a ring post. The result was a skull fracture and partial paralysis. His fighting career was over—*snap,* just like that.

Jericho had had a brief contact with Jimmy while Kane was still on his way up. He had seen him fight, been fascinated by his physical perfection, his amazing reflexes. He had drawn some sketches and shown them to Jimmy in his dressing room. The young fighter had been pleased and flattered. He had come around to the Mews to look at some of Jericho's paintings. He was, Jericho thought, an intelligent, warmhearted young man.

Jericho was out of town when Jimmy had his accident. He read about it. The paralysis had eventually been cured, but Jimmy wasn't able to regain his sharp physical skills. His chance for the big money was gone. Somehow he got to taking drugs, ran the whole gamut of self-destruction, and wound up in Lexington, Kentucky, having served several jail sentences for possession of narcotics.

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Basically, Jimmy Kane was a gutty guy. At Lexington he kicked the habit. He returned to New York and found a new aim in life—helping others in his own world who had fallen into the drug trap. He was loved and respected for a new reason by the people in his part of town.

The night before Jericho read of Kane's dramatic death, Jimmy had walked into the neighborhood police precinct house. He was known and respected there. He often turned up to ask about kids he was trying to help who might be in trouble with the cops. Patrolman Martin had been at the water cooler and had waved a hello to Jimmy. Sergeant Kohler was standing with his back to Jimmy, bending over a desk to fill out some forms. Suddenly Kohler felt his gun being wrenched out of its holster. He spun around to find himself facing Kane, the gun in Jimmy's hand. Before Kohler could act Jimmy lifted the gun and blew out his own brains.

The newspaper story Jericho read expressed the shock of the community. Jimmy's life story was told—the accident that had ended his career, the resulting deep depression, the drugs. But he had licked the drug habit. People thought he was happy at what he was doing. But evidently it had all been too much for him.

Jericho was sorry. He would find out when and where the funeral would be held and pay his respects to Jimmy. But before he could make those inquiries the girl came to Jefferson Mews.

Jericho answered the door and found himself facing an attractive blonde girl. She had the figure of a fashion model and she was dressed inexpensively but in style. He guessed she was looking for work, posing for him. Word seemed to get around whenever he was in town.

"Mr. Jericho?" she asked. It was a warm low voice.

"Yes." He was aware of a kind of dark tragedy in her blue eyes.

"You are—were—a friend of Jimmy Kane's?"

"Yes, I knew Jimmy. Rotten shame what happened. I read about it in the paper."

"May I come in and talk to you?"

"Of course."

She came in. She looked around at the brilliant paintings on the wall. He could have sworn she didn't see them. She took the chair he waved to and sat, gripping the arms so tightly her knuckles showed white.

"Jimmy talked about you," she said. "My name is Marilyn

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Sims, by the way. So I know you know about such things, Mr. Jericho."

"What things?"

"I don't believe Jimmy shot himself," the girl said.

Jericho felt his eyebrows go up. "My dear child, two men saw him do it," he said. "Two policemen."

"I don't believe he did it," the girl said.

Her lips trembled and her whole body was shaking. She was very close to hysteria, Jericho thought, so he played it cool. "I only know what I read in the paper," he said. "It seemed pretty clear that Jimmy shot himself in front of two reliable witnesses."

"I tell you I don't believe it!"

"Look," Jericho said, "would you like some coffee?" He didn't wait for an answer, but went over to the electric percolator on the sideboard and poured her a cup. "Sugar? Cream?"

She shook her head.

He turned to a large open bookcase that contained stacks of sketchbooks. He selected one and brought it back with the coffee.

"These might interest you," he said.

The book contained the series of sketches he'd made of Jimmy Kane. Some of them were the full figure—Jimmy in action. Some of them were just fragments—studies of his back, the muscles of his shoulders, a fighter's profile, chin tucked in against his chest.

"They're beautiful," she said after a moment, and her voice broke. She looked up at him, her eyes wide. "Would it shock you to know that just two hours before Jimmy is supposed to have shot himself he and I were making love together?"

"Why should it shock me?"

"We've been lovers for nearly six months, Mr. Jericho. For the last two months Jimmy has been pleading with me to marry him."

Jericho smiled. "Why not? It may be an old-fashioned idea, but quite a few people still believe in it."

"Because we both came up out of the bottom," the girl said. "Jimmy was on drugs, with several convictions against him. I—I have served time for shoplifting and—and other crimes. I have a brother who was on drugs. Jimmy helped him—it was through him I met Jimmy. He got me straightened out and we fell in love.

"Just two hours before he is supposed to have killed himself I had said 'Yes,' I would marry him. He was very high on happiness, Mr. Jericho, when he left me to go to work. He works—

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worked—in the drug rehabilitation center, you know. He had to see a couple of kids who were in trouble. We made a date for dinner to make plans for when and where we'd be married. There is no way, absolutely no way, he could have been plunged into such a state of despair that he would kill himself two hours after he left me."

"And yet he did it in front of two witnesses."

"Never!"

Her conviction was very real. She wasn't trying to sell herself something. She was as certain as anyone could be.

"What do you want me to do, Marilyn?" he asked.

"Find out what really happened!"

Slowly Jericho began to fill a charred black pipe from an oilskin pouch. "I can't even guess what happened, Marilyn. I can't imagine what toppled Jimmy from the pinnacle of happiness to suicidal despair. I don't know where to begin. I—"

"You don't believe me!" she said. "I know it couldn't have happened the way they tell it."

Jericho held his lighter to the pipe until he got it well going. "Nothing can bring Jimmy back," he said. "If I dig into this I may come up with answers that are more painful than the way it stands now. His reasons, his motives—"

"He didn't do it!" she said. She stood up, unsteadily. "If you don't believe that, you won't be able to help."

He put his big hand on her shoulder. He could feel her trembling. "I'll do what I can, Marilyn. But I can't promise anything."

Police Captain Swann, who commanded the local precinct, was a decent man. Jericho knew him. Once a few months back there had been some trouble with gang wars in the area. Jericho had involved himself and found Swann to be a tough cop but also a man with compassion for human problems.

"Long time no see," Swann said, when Jericho was admitted to his office.

"I'm out of town a lot, Captain."

"What can I do for you or is this just a social call?"

"I was distressed to hear what happened to Jimmy Kane," Jericho said. "He was a friend."

"Poor guy," Swann said. "It was something hard to believe, Mr. Jericho. He was in and out of here all the time, you know. He was doing a great job at this drug rehabilitation center. We tried to

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cooperate with him—let him know if we saw any of his kids where they oughtn't to be, or hanging around with the wrong people."

"The reason I'm asking about him," Jericho said, "is that I have reason to believe things were all going his way. He was a success at his job. He'd licked the habit himself. He was riding the top of the wave. Why would he do such a thing?"

Swann frowned. "Maybe I can help you there," he said. "There were some facts we decided not to give out to the press, and I think you'll understand why when I tell you."

So there was an answer, Jericho thought.

"Naturally, after it happened," Swann went on, "we searched the body. We found a couple of ounces of heroin on him, a needle, a tourniquet—the whole equipment. We put two and two together, Mr. Jericho. He was hooked again. After two years of private struggling he'd lost his biggest fight. He couldn't face it."

"You say you had a reason for not telling this to the press."

"It wouldn't do any good and it could do a lot of harm," Swann said. "Those kids he worked with. They loved him, trusted him, idolized him. If they knew he'd lost his own fight. . ."

Jericho drew a deep breath. "That answers a big question for me," he said. "Maybe it's just morbid curiosity, but I'd like to hear from the two men who saw it just how it happened. Possible?"

"Ordinarily they wouldn't be here this time of day," Swann said. "They're on the four o'clock shift. It was less than a half hour after they came on yesterday that it happened. They were pretty shaken up, both of them. I sent 'em home and told 'em to come back this morning to make out a full report. You want to talk to them I'll have them in."

The two cops were in civilian clothes. Sergeant Kohler was a gray-haired veteran with bright blue eyes. Patrolman Martin was young, eager-looking.

"It was the damnedest thing," Martin said. "We'd just come on duty. The sergeant and I were the only ones in the front room. The sergeant was at the desk, his back to the door, and I was over at the water cooler when Jimmy came in."

"He came in often," Kohler said, "just to chew the fat, rap about his kids, you know."

"I said, 'Hi, Jimmy,'" Martin said. "He said 'Hi!' and walked over toward the sergeant. There didn't seem anything odd about the way he looked or acted."

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"I knew he was there because I heard Martin speak to him," Kohler said. "I was busy with the reports the off-duty officer had left me, so I didn't turn around."

"He walked right over to the sergeant," Martin said. "He reached out and pulled the sergeant's gun from its holster. I couldn't believe what I was seeing—except that I guess I thought Jimmy meant it as some kind of a gag."

"I felt the gun go and I spun around," Kohler said. "He'd taken a step or two back from me. I was about to yell at him like what the hell he was doing when he put the gun up to his temple and pulled the trigger."

"I just froze where I was," Martin said. "I couldn't believe what I was seeing."

"He went down, his brains spattered on the floor," Kohler said. "I just couldn't believe it at the time."

"At the time?"

"I told Mr. Jericho what we found on him," Swann said.

"Oh." Kohler looked relieved. "Well, that explains it, I guess. Too bad. He was a good Joe."

Jericho stood very still, a nerve twitching high up on his cheek. "Thanks," he said, in a flat voice. "Thanks for telling me."

Jericho spoke as gently as he could to the blonde girl.

"They found drugs on him, Marilyn—heroin, needle, the works."

She looked at Jericho steadily. They were in her small apartment on Jane Street. "So?" she said.

"He was evidently back on the stuff, Marilyn. Perhaps he was high on that as well as on happiness when he left you. When it wore off—" Jericho shrugged. "He knew he couldn't make it. He knew he'd destroy your life as well as his own."

"That, Mr. Jericho, is utter nonsense," the girl said. "Jimmy was clean for almost two years. I can swear to that."

"Then how do you account for what they found on him?"

"He took it from somebody else, from one of his kids. He just happened to have it on him when they killed him."

"When who killed him?"

"That's what I hoped you'd find out."

Jericho sighed. "What a wife you'd have made, Marilyn. A woman who believes in her man the way you do—"

"We should be able to find out about the stuff. The boys at the Center might know if he took it from one of the kids."

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"Let's try," Jericho said. Something was bothering him, something was itching at him. He was, he realized, beginning to believe the impossible.

The Drug Rehabilitation Center was located in the basement of an old church. There were Ping-Pong tables, dart boards, and other games. It was like a club for boys. Marilyn was evidently well known to the boys. She had worked there with Jimmy in her free time. They crowded around her, shy of Jericho at first.

Here Marilyn had real allies. She was flooded by variations of the same question: "What really happened to Jimmy?" Mr. Jericho was helping to find out, she told them. One thing he needed to clear up. The police had found drugs and a needle and other equipment on Jimmy and they assumed he was back on the stuff.

"Oh, way out, man!"

"No way! Not Jimmy."

"Then where did he get the stuff he had on him?" Jericho asked.

"Took it from Teddy Washington," a boy said. "Teddy had it on him yesterday afternoon when Jimmy come in here."

"Teddy tell him where he got it?" Jericho asked.

"No way, man. You squeal on the pusher and the big shots who supply the pusher don't like it. They fix you good and that way they make it clear to everyone else. Jimmy wouldn't even ask Teddy because he'd know Teddy couldn't tell him."

Jericho nodded. He was beginning to believe, but there was still a small doubt. These kids would stand back of Jimmy, would lie for Jimmy. If Jimmy had slipped and was back on the stuff they'd deny it forever. But there was a way to make sure.

Jericho went to the pay phone in the far corner of the room, dropped in a dime, and called a number. The man he eventually got on the other end was Lieutenant Pascal of the Homicide Squad, an old friend.

"Not working these days, Lieutenant?" Jericho asked.

"There are so many murders these days, Johnny, I've thrown in my hand. I just sit here doing *The Times'* crossword puzzle."

"Is the puzzle too engrossing for you to do me a favor?"

"Name it."

"A fellow named Jimmy Kane committed suicide in a police station yesterday."

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"I read about it. Friend of yours?"

"Friend of mine," Jericho said. "How tough would it be for you to get the Medical Examiner's report?"

"Like a phone call," Pascal said. "What do you want to know?"

"Was he on drugs? Were there signs of it in his system? Were there any recent needle marks on him?"

"You got another dime?" Pascal said. "It shouldn't take me longer than that. Hold on."

Jericho held on. The operator asked for another dime and he fed the machine. Then Pascal came back.

"Your boy was clean," he said. "Nothing in the blood. No needle marks. Some very old scars. He was on the stuff some years ago, you know. But clean right now."

Jericho frowned. "Wouldn't Captain Swann, who was in charge of the case, know that?"

"Not unless he had a reason to inquire," Pascal said. "It isn't in the report, Johnny. I found out by asking because you wanted to know. The M.E.'s report doesn't say what they don't find. Man died of a gunshot wound in the right temple, close enough to be a suicide. It doesn't say that your friend didn't have stomach trouble or didn't have diabetes or wasn't on drugs. It only reports what they did find."

"Thanks, Lieutenant."

"Hey, wait a minute. I have a normal amount of curiosity, you know."

"I may have work for you," Jericho said.

"How do you mean?"

"I think Jimmy Kane was murdered," Jericho said.

"But two cops saw what happened!"

"I know they did," Jericho said. "See you around."

He went back to Marilyn and the waiting boys. He smiled at the girl. "The Medical Examiner says Jimmy was clean—no drugs, no new needle marks."

"I didn't need him to tell me," Marilyn said.

Jericho looked around at the faces of the boys. "How many of you know Sergeant Kohler and Patrolman Martin at the precinct house by sight?"

Four hands went up.

"I'd like to ask a favor. Kohler and Martin are on the four o'clock shift, which means they get off at midnight. Could you guys watch them for me when they leave? They may go some-

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where together, they may go separately. I want you to see where they go and phone me. Can do?"

"No sweat, man."

"So they'll go home," Marilyn said.

"Not when I get through with them," Jericho said.

Jericho had the capacity to turn to work when he wanted to shut out other problems. Most of the rest of that day and the early part of the evening he stood before the easel in his studio, painting. The case of Jimmy Kane was apparently erased from his consciousness. But at exactly 9:30 in the evening he put down his brushes, undressed, took a steaming hot shower, and then put on fresh clothes—dark-gray slacks, a black turtlenecked knit shirt, a tan corduroy jacket.

It was ten o'clock when he picked up the phone. He had taken his handkerchief out of his pocket and he held it, crumpled, over the mouthpiece of the phone as he dialed.

"I'd like to speak to Sergeant Kohler," he said, when there was an answer.

"Kohler here," Kohler said when he came on, brisk and efficient.

"I want to talk to you about Jimmy Kane," Jericho said.

"You better take the hot potato out of your mouth," Kohler said. "You're not coming over clear."

"Clear enough," Jericho said. "You see, Kohler, I know exactly what happened to Jimmy Kane. I figure it ought to be worth five thousand bucks to you and Martin for me to keep quiet about it."

Kohler's voice was suddenly tense. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'll give you till morning to get up the bread," Jericho said. "I'll call you again so we can figure out how you get it to me."

"Now listen, Mac, I don't know who you are or what you think you know, but I'll tell you one thing. I don't have—"

Jericho put down the receiver. He smoothed out his handkerchief and put it back in his pocket. He went about the business of making himself three eggs, toast, and coffee. After he'd finished eating he sat in a big armchair, a sketch pad in his lap, playing games with a pencil.

Time moved slowly. About fifteen minutes past midnight his phone rang.

"Mr. Jericho? About those two cops."

"Yes?"

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"They went straight from the precinct house to Guardine's Bar and Grill. It's about two blocks from—"

"I know the place," Jericho said.

"Well, that's where they're at, Mr. Jericho."

"Thanks, son."

"No sweat, man."

"I'll see you around."

"Count on it, man."

Jericho turned out the studio lights and went out. He walked out of the Mews and turned south. Guardine's was only a short distance away. Guardine's was a steakhouse and bar, not frequented by high society but not cheap. At this time of night the dinner business was over. A few male customers were at the bar and some of the booths along the west wall were occupied by men and women.

In the farthest booth from the door Jericho spotted Kohler and Martin sitting with a sleekly groomed man who was talking to them earnestly. The two policemen were in civilian clothes. Jericho's mouth hardened, then he sauntered over to the booth. Martin and the sleek man were sitting together on one side of the table. The gray-haired Kohler was facing them.

Jericho stopped by the booth. "Hello, Sergeant," he said.

Kohler jerked his head around and forced a smile. "Hi, Mr. Jericho. This a watering place of yours?"

"I just dropped in," Jericho said. "Hello, Martin."

Martin nodded. "This is Bill Guardine who owns the joint," Martin said.

Guardine's dark eyes glittered. "Hi," he said.

"Ah, yes," Jericho said. "Guardine. Move over, Kohler, I'll buy a round of drinks."

"Look, Mr. Jericho," Kohler said, "we've got a little busines to transact, so if we could have a rain check—?"

"I have a little business to transact, too," Jericho said, "and I imagine it's connected with yours. I decided not to wait till morning to work out the way you'll get the money to me." He moved in and sat down next to Kohler, facing Guardine.

Kohler moistened his lips. "You were the one who called me?"

"The hot potato was a handkerchief held over the mouthpiece," Jericho said. He smiled, a cold smile, at Guardine. "You going to put up the money for the boys, Guardine?"

"You blown your mind or something?" Guardine asked. His

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narrowed eyes moved out toward the bar, looking for someone or something.

"I don't think the price is too high," Jericho said. "You don't pay and my friends here, Kohler and Martin, will get the business. With the heat properly applied I suspect they'll talk, which means that in the end you and your pushers will get the business."

"What is it you think you know?" Guardine asked.

"I know how Jimmy Kane died and why," Jericho said. "Jimmy was a smart boy. He had something like his own police force—about three dozen desperate kids who would do anything in the world for him. I imagine he set a trap for you guys and he came to you with the evidence—heroin, needle, the rest of it. He'd found out you two noble bluecoats were protecting the pushers on the street. He faced you with it and you knew he had you cold. You, Kohler, and Martin, just happened to be alone and you did the one thing you could to save your miserable corrupt hides. You pulled your gun, Kohler, and you shot Jimmy in the head. All so smooth, so slick, and whatever Jimmy knew about you died with him."

"You're dreaming, Jericho," Kohler said. His face had gone a pasty white and he was sweating.

"I figured you weren't being paid off by the pushers on the street," Jericho said, "so I thought I'd find out who was the Big Man. So I phoned you and you led me here." He smiled at Guardine. "So you turn out to be the Big Man, Dad."

"And you expect to get paid off with nothing but a dream in your head?" Guardine asked.

"I'll let you in on a secret," Jericho said, smiling and smiling. "I really don't want the money. I just wanted to get led to you and it worked. I may not have evidence in my hands, but I can make enough noise so that honest men will find the evidence and pin it on you."

Guardine had been sitting with his hands in his lap. He moved slightly, then he spoke in a very low voice.

"Pointing at your belly button under the table, Jericho, is a gun with a silencer on it. I suggest we talk about this in my office."

"I like it here with witnesses around," Jericho said.

"Let me tell you something, wise guy," Guardine said. "There isn't a person in this place who will see anything that happens; if they do, they won't remember what it was. So start moving."

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Jericho still smiled. "You don't give me much choice, do you, Big Man?"

Jericho suddenly moved. Under the table he kicked out savagely. There was the faint sound of a silenced shot and Kohler screamed. The bullet had shattered his kneecap. At the same moment Jericho stood up and the table went over against Guardine and Martin, pinning them in the booth.

Jericho reached out, grabbed Guardine by the collar, and yanked him out of the booth. His left hand came up against Guardine's jaw in a devastating uppercut so that the gangster sagged in Jericho's collar hold.

Jericho's bright eyes turned to Martin. "Don't reach for your gun, friend, unless you want me to break your neck."

Jericho spun Guardine around and flattened him against the wall. "No witnesses, you said, Guardine. I had a feeling that's the way it would be, so I brought my own. Take a look around."

Guardine turned his head and found himself faced by a semicircle of young faces, white, black, brown. In the center of the group was a lovely blonde girl. Beyond them Guardine saw customers and waiters hurrying out of his place.

"One of you kids call Captain Swann," Jericho said, "and maybe we better have an ambulance for our friend Kohler. He's hurting." He swung Guardine around and literally threw him into the booth with Martin and Kohler. He took a step or two toward the girl. "So we know, Marilyn," he said. "Unfortunately it isn't going to do Jimmy much good."

"But you finished his job for him and left him clean," the girl said. "Thank you for that, Mr. Jericho."

Jericho looked back at the three crumpled men in the booth. "My pleasure," he said.

"Q"

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Julian Symons

The Crimson Coach Murders

"It's rather steep, this path," said Miss Penny. "And a little bit slippery."

"You'll be all right," said her companion reassuringly. "Just hold on to the rail."

"Oh, don't worry about me. I haven't enjoyed myself so much for years. It was such a wonderful idea, the coach tour. Everybody seems so nice. And the weather."

Miss Penny looked up, a little old birdlike woman wearing a mauve silk frock, a hat with a great deal of fruit on it, and dazzlingly ornamental dark glasses.

The cliff rose up, as it seemed, a long way above her, overhanging so that the top was invisible. She saw sky and sea that, through her glasses, was not dazzling but muted blue. She saw the face of her companion, smiling. And below, quite near now, was a rocky cove hollowed out of the cliff, with little pools between the rocks.

"Rather a sharp turn," said her companion. A hand was laid on her arm, on the arm that held the handrail.

"This is really a great adventure," Miss Penny said gaily.

Quite gently the hand lifted her arm from the rail, and a knee pushed her less gently in the back. Miss Penny fell helter-skelter down the last few steps, squawking like a duck. She caught her head nastily on a rock, and before she could get up, before she really knew what was happening at all, hard hands gripped her shoulders and forced her resistlessly down so that her face touched the salt and slimy water in one of the pools.

Miss Penny struggled then, and tried to speak, but when she opened her mouth, water filled it. She did not struggle for long. It was the end of her great adventure.

Her hat floated on the pool, like a toy boat laden with cherries and strawberries. Her body lay face down in the water.

There was one more thing to do, and her companion did it. The time was just after six o'clock in the evening . . .

The Crimson Coach Luxury Tour party sat in the lounge of the

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Barbeck Hotel and waited for dinner. The Barbeck was not the best hotel in Eastbourne, but it justified well enough, Gilbert Langham thought, the brochure's claim: *'The hotels specially selected by our experts offer THE BEST OF EVERYTHING—food prepared by Continental chefs, smiling service, and rooms with a view of the sea.'* The room was comfortable, the service was quick, and there were pleasant smells coming from the dining room.

But back to duty. This was really a piece of field research for Gil Langham, whose fifth detective novel was to be about a murder committed on a coach tour in Southern England. With part of a plot sketched out he found himself at a loss to imagine what sort of people actually went on such a tour. What could be simpler than to go on one himself, and find out?

He took a small black notebook from his pocket and studied what he had already written, after the trip down from London with its break for a "surprise" lunch (which proved to be a picnic), and a visit to Arundel Castle.

William and Mary Blake. Married couple. Husband much older than wife. Wandered off on their own this afternoon.

Gil Langham looked at them now, sitting on a window seat with hands touching, and wondered if they were honeymooners.

At a table nearby sat the handsome gray-haired old man named Antrobus; and on a sofa Mrs. Elaine Williams lay back studying her blood-red nails and looking bored. He read what he had written.

Mr. Antrobus. Retired businessman? Made a fuss when we stopped for drinks, said he'd been charged twopence too much for tomato juice. But looks prosperous. Doesn't seem really to be enjoying himself.

Elaine Williams. Merry Widow spider? Looking for husband-fly to walk into her parlor?

A hand was placed on his shoulder, and a voice boomed in his ear. "Hello, hello! This won't do. Settling down to work while you're on holiday isn't allowed. Have a drink, old man."

Tompkins was fortyish, almost bald, and obviously destined for the part of bore of the tour. But very likely his book would have a bore in it, Gilbert Langham thought with a mental sigh as he said that he would like a drink. As they passed the Merry Widow she looked up. Her eyes telegraphed an invitation which Langham ignored.

"Not a bad looker, that," Tompkins said when they had their

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whiskies at the bar. "Did you notice her giving me the eye? But I always say, take it easy. You don't want to start anything you can't finish on a holiday like this."

"You've been on tours like this before?"

"I get around," Tompkins said "Now, don't think I'm nosey, old man, but I always flatter myself I can spot a man's occupation. You're a schoolmaster, right?"

Gilbert had been prepared for this. "No. I'm a journalist, a free lance."

"Looking for copy, eh? Writing us up?"

"Of course not!" But he felt uncomfortable. The look in Tompkins' eye had been remarkably shrewd. He might be a bore, but he was far from a fool.

A young man came into the lounge, a young man with a tanned face, dark hair carefully parted, and teeth that showed dazzlingly white when he smiled. This was Jerry Benton, the tour guide, who seemed to Gilbert Langham rather too much of a good thing. One couldn't make him a murderer in a story because it would be too obvious, but all the same—

"Don't like that chap," Tompkins said, cutting into and confirming his thoughts. "Don't trust him. 'Call me Jerry,' he says. I'll call him—" And he made a coarse joke.

Benton was going round from table to table, talking to all the members of the party, many of whom Gilbert Langham did not know. He chatted for a minute with Mr. Antrobus and then stopped beside the Merry Widow. They came over to the bar together. Benton performed introductions in a low, pleasant voice.

"There is a dance this evening at the Winter Garden. For those on the tour there is no charge."

"Don't dance," Tompkins snapped.

"And a concert at the Pavilion. Again no charge. Tomorrow morning at ten thirty there is a mystery tour that will last the morning."

"Same old South Downs mystery, I suppose," Tompkins said.

Benton was imperturbable. "Those who wish to stay here may, of course, do so. We leave the hotel after lunch."

The Merry Widow smiled at him. "Are you going to the dance?"

Benton smiled back. "Of course!"

The dinner gong sounded, and at the same moment the manager came into the lounge with a tall, hard-faced man wearing a blue serge suit. They came up to Benton together.

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"Mr. Benton?" the man in the blue suit said. "My name is Lake. Detective-Superintendent Lake."

For a moment there seemed to be a break in Benton's perfect composure, then his smile was in place again. "Yes, Superintendent. What can I do for you?"

"You have a Miss Penny in your coach party?"

"That's right. But she's not here at the moment. She is a little late for dinner."

"Miss Penny won't want dinner. She's dead."

Mrs. Williams gave a little scream.

Tompkins said, "An accident?"

"It seems that she fell down by some rocks, caught her head, and drowned in a pool." The Superintendent spoke with deliberate slowness. "But there's one odd thing. A book, with all the pages torn out, was by her side. The pages were scattered around."

"What was the book?" Gil Langham asked.

Superintendent Lake stared at him. *"The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes."*

Langham stared, and said with a gulp when asked his occupation, "I write detective stories."

A sergeant in the corner of the manager's office, where this interrogation was taking place, snorted slightly. Gilbert Langham gulped again, and decided that he might as well go on. "I'm here to get background material for a new book."

"You've been very successful." With the same grim sarcasm Lake said, "Using your no doubt exceptional faculties of observation, have you noticed anything odd on this coach tour so far?"

"I can't think of anything."

"Or about Miss Penny?"

Miss Penny, Miss Penny? They had hardly spoken. She was a face to him, no more than that—an old face inquisitive and perhaps vain, topped by a ridiculous hat. "I remember the fruit on her hat more than the face under it. Wasn't it an accident, then, Superintendent?"

"This is a queer business." Lake stared hard at him. "A crime writer might have thought it up." Langham flinched. "This little old woman goes off for a walk, climbs down some steps, slips—we can see the mark—falls, hits her head, and drowns in a pool of water. That's the way it looks. I think we might accept it as an accident.

"But then someone—someone, Mr. Langham—tears the pages

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out of a famous detective book, throws them all over the place, and leaves the gutted book by her body. If she was murdered, why should the murderer do that, after arranging things to look like a neat little accident? Or why should anybody else do it? This is the kind of thing that should appeal to a writer of crime stories."

The way in which these last words were spoken made Gilbert Langham gulp again. "Have you found out anything about Miss Penny? I mean, why should anybody want to kill her?"

The sergeant in the corner said, "Evelyn Penny. Spinster. Lived at 18 Cotes Avenue, Turnham Green, London. Told other members of party that she had retired from work in drapery store, had small private income, went away somewhere every year. Did not appear to know anyone else in coach party."

"And her movements, Sergeant?"

"Coach arrived Barbeck Hotel, Eastbourne, about three thirty. Miss Penny had tea in lounge, then said she was going for a stroll. Was seen by Mr. Tompkins on front, later by Mr. and Mrs. Blake having photograph taken at the Nu-Stile-Picksher stall also on the front. This was about four forty-five. Not seen afterwards until discovery of body just before seven o'clock. Purse appeared not to have been touched and no sign of bodily violence."

"There's nothing to connect this with the coach," the Superintendent said. "But still, I'd like to keep what you might call an unofficial sort of an eye on your party. With your powers of observation, Mr. Langham, you could be a help to us in that way if you cared to."

The Superintendent smiled now. It made the request sound like an order.

"All right. But I don't really see what you want me to do."

"Just keep your eyes and ears open. We'll get in touch with you again in a day or two."

Dinner was late, but it could not be said that Miss Penny's death cast a shadow over the coach party. Rather it provided a ready-made subject of conversation which could be added to the weather and the food. Gilbert Langham sat afterward at a table with the Blakes and listened to them talking about it.

"Honestly, you know, Mr. Langham, I don't think the poor thing was quite all there," Mary Blake said. "I mean, we saw her having her photograph taken on the parade by those people who give away prizes every day—"

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"Nu-Stile-Pickshers," her husband said. He was a hearty, tweed-jacketed, pipe-smoking man in his early thirties, perhaps ten years older than his birdlike wife. "Advertising stunt, you know. As a matter of fact, we had our own pictures taken."

"But no luck with a prize," Mary Blake said. "Anyway, when the young man asked if she wanted her picture taken, she was primping and blushing like a girl of fifteen."

Mr. Blake puffed at his pipe, rustled the evening paper. "I reckon some man got hold of her—sex maniac, probably."

"But Bill," his wife said with ghoulish eagerness, "there wasn't—I mean, she wasn't *interfered with,* was she?"

Bill Blake was having trouble with his pipe. He tapped out the dottle in an ashtray. "The Superintendent didn't say so. If we're going to this dance, my girl, you ought to get ready."

Mary Blake excused herself. Her husband began to read the paper.

Gilbert Langham also went to the dance at the Winter Garden. The unattached women in the party, he saw, were beginning to pair up with men. He found himself asking the Merry Widow to dance. They talked, as seemed inevitable, about Miss Penny.

"I'm so glad it hasn't been allowed to spoil the tour," she said. "Jerry has been simply marvelous about it. You know how silly people are—they get worried; but Jerry's told them all it was just an accident."

"That was good of him."

"Yes, wasn't it? But he must have had a lot of experience in handling awkward situations. He was some sort of courier in the Middle East at one time. And then he was a smuggler."

"Really? What did he smuggle, Mrs. Williams?"

"My name's Elaine." She came close to him. The bloom of youth, he saw, had been replaced by the enamel of middle age, but she was still an attractive woman. She whispered in his ear, "Diamonds."

He wanted to ask why, if Jerry Benton was a diamond smuggler, he had this humble job of guide to a coach party, but after all it was none of his business if the guide liked to tell fairy stories to impressionable women. Instead he said, "Who was particularly worried about Miss Penny?"

"That's a funny thing, It was the man who keeps himself so much to himself. Mr. Antrobus."

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Mr. Antrobus, gray-haired and really remarkably handsome, sat in the lounge drinking coffee when the party from the Winter Garden returned, gay and chattering. Tompkins also was in the lounge. He made a beeline for Gilbert Langham.

"I've had a word with the Super and told him my theory about the Penny murder—"

Jerry Benton interrupted him. "It was an accident. And anyway it's rather a gloomy subject, old man. I think it should be declared closed."

Tompkins glared at him. "It's a free country. This is my theory. That old girl, Miss Penny, had somehow got the wrong side of a chap who's a maniac about books, see. And this chap did for her, and then left the book by her side. What you might call symbolism."

There was a clatter from the other side of the lounge. Mr. Antrobus had knocked his coffee cup to the floor. He did not pick it up, but slowly rose and walked over to the lift.

"Good night," Tompkins said cheerfully.

Mr. Antrobus did not reply.

A man who is tired of Brighton is tired of life, Gilbert Langham said to himself, bringing Dr. Johnson up to date. He walked from the lawns of Hove to the Palace Pier in a trance of pleasure, leaving the promenade as he passed the Metropole to walk down beside the beach.

Here children shrieked happily; their parents bought tea trays and sticky cakes; young men in vivid shirts left the sunlight to play earnestly at pinball machines in the amusement arcades.

Behind the popular, vulgar Brighton lay the solid hotels full of money, and behind them the appropriately artificial glamor of the Prince Regent's onion domes. He stopped before a little hut that said *Nu-Stile-Pickshers.* Underneath was a sign in dashing scarlet calligraphy: *'Hav Yore Foto Takn and Win Wun of Our Munny Prizes.'* A curly-haired young man with an engaging smile was in charge.

"Step right up now, and take advantage of this stupendous offer. Three postcard size pictures for a bob, and a money prize if you get one of today's lucky numbers."

A chord was struck in Gilbert Langham's mind. "Haven't you got a place in Eastbourne?"

"Eastbourne, Littlehampton, Brighton, Worthing, Folkestone—a

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dozen places along the coast," the young man said. "But only one set of prizes each day, and each day at a different town. Today it's Brighton. Come along, you lucky people, we're offering you twenty-five quid to nothing."

"You were offering prizes in Eastbourne yesterday," Langham said. "Did you happen to see an old lady named Miss Penny?"

The young man looked at him sharply, then shouted inside the hut, "Just going out for a cuppa," and led the way to a self-service café twenty yards away from the hut. He put three spoonfuls of sugar in his tea, stirred, and said, "The name's Wilson, Charlie Wilson. What's yours?"

"Gilbert Langham."

"So now we know each other's monicker. I like to know who I'm talking to. Now, what's your interest?"

There was something a shade odd about the young man, Langham thought, as though he knew that working for Nu-Stile-Pickshers demanded a front of brass that was not natural to him. A university graduate seeing the other side of life?

"I'm one of the coach party she was with. I write crime stories and her death roused—well, you might call it my professional curiosity."

"Fair enough. She came along yesterday, had her picture taken. Funny old girl! I remember the way she mucked around with her hat, trying it this way and that for effect. Then she went off. I told the police." He hesitated.

"You've remembered something else." Gilbert Langham was careful not to sound too eager.

"Not exactly. It's just that they were only trying to fix a time, and I told them she came along at a quarter to five. They didn't want anything else, so I didn't tell them."

"Tell them what?"

"She seemed a bit excited, as if she was going to meet someone. And after she left the hut she did meet someone. I saw her."

"What did he look like?"

"I only caught a glimpse, mind. And side face. I'm not sure I could identify him. But he was a good-looking sort of chap, about her own age I should say. And he had a fine crop of iron-gray hair."

Mr. Antrobus.

"Superintendent Lake, please," he said into the receiver. "Tell

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him it's Gilbert Langham. About Miss Penny."

There was a click and he heard Lake's voice, with its faint undertone of sarcasm. "Yes, Mr. Langham?"

With attempted casualness he said, "I've been talking to a man named Wilson, who works for those Nu-Stile-Pickshers people. He saw Miss Penny walking with somebody after she had her photograph taken yesterday."

"Why didn't he tell us?"

"You were concentrating on the time," he said with a touch of complacency. "Wilson's not sure that he could identify the man, but says he had a fine crop of gray hair. From the description it might be a man on the tour named Antrobus."

There was silence. Then Lake said, "Miss Penny died between six and six thirty. Antrobus was in the hotel lounge a minute or two after six o'clock. Three or four people saw him."

"Alibis have been broken before now," Gilbert Langham said. He put down the receiver.

The telephone booth was opposite the Palace Pier. When he came out of it he hesitated. The coach party had split up, some of them going on a tour of the Royal Pavilion, and others preferring what was rather oddly called "Free Time." They were all to meet back at the Packham Hotel at half-past six. With an hour to fill, Gilbert Langham went on to the Palace Pier.

He strolled idly, sniffing the salt air, until he saw ahead of him the gray hair and slightly shuffling walk of Mr. Antrobus. It was with a feeling that he was about to make a discovery of vital importance that he cautiously followed the gray head up the pier, and with some disappointment that he saw Mr. Antrobus turn into the Palace of Pleasure and settle down to play a game called Cup and Ball, at which he proved to be rather skillful.

He went up behind Antrobus and said, "Hello!"

The gray-haired man turned round with what might have been a look of alarm, but when he recognized Langham, it was only one of annoyance. "Good afternoon."

"You didn't go to the Pavilion?"

"Evidently not."

"You're not forced to do anything on this sort of tour—that's what I like about it."

Mr. Antrobus did not reply. He shot up a small silver ball and dexterously caught it in the cup.

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"Where did you go with Miss Penny after you met her yesterday afternoon?"

Mr. Antrobus was about to catch another ball. His hand jerked, and he dropped it. He turned round and said very decidedly, "I did not meet Miss Penny. I did not even know her. You are being a nuisance. Will you please go away?"

Gilbert Langham went away.

When the tour of the Pavilion was over, the Blakes and the tour guide, Jerry Benton, went down to the beach.

"Have you made up your minds?" Jerry Benton asked.

"Let me see it again." There was something greedy in Bill Blake's voice.

They sat down. Jerry drew from an inside pocket something wrapped in tissue. As he unwrapped it, the white stone sparkled in the sunlight.

"Oh, Bill," Mary Blake breathed, "it's lovely, lovely!"

"You're asking a hundred," her husband said. "That's a lot of money."

"A quarter of what it's worth." Jerry Benton began to wrap the stone.

"Don't put it away. I told you, I don't know anything about diamonds. I'd need to have it examined by a jeweler."

"And have him asking where it came from? Not likely! I risked a five-year sentence to bring this in. I'm not having any jeweler poking his nose in."

"Bill," said Mary Blake in a small voice, "Mr. Tompkins said last night that he knew a lot about jewelry. Supposing he looked at it for us, would that—?" She left the sentence unfinished.

"That would suit me." Blake looked at Benton.

Benton hesitated, then shrugged. "Tompkins doesn't love me much. But all right. You can show it to him tonight."

He let the stone rest in his palm. Blake could not take his eyes off it.

"Another whiskey?" Bill Blake said.

"I don't mind if I do." Tompkins was wearing a brightly checked shirt, open to reveal his boiled red neck, and purplish linen trousers. He downed half the whiskey at a gulp and sighed with pleasure. "This is the life."

"Mr. Tompkins." Mary Blake put her pretty arms on the bar counter and looked at him with her birdlike head on one side.

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"You said you used to be an agent for a firm of jewelers."

"Correct, my dear lady. Brant and Boulding, Hatton Garden, dealers in precious stones."

"Would you look at a stone for us?"

Tompkins frowned. "Mixing business and pleasure—don't like that. Why d'you want me to look at it?"

"We'd pay you—" Bill Blake began, but his wife interrupted.

"We're thinking of buying it and wondered how much we should pay. And we're awfully stupid about these things. We thought we'd come to an expert."

The frown changed to a leer. "Anything to oblige a charming lady," Tompkins said.

Upstairs in Tompkins' room, Bill Blake took out of his pocket the stone wrapped in tissue which Jerry Benton had given him, with the remark that nobody could say he didn't trust his fellow men. Tompkins glanced at it, raised his thick eyebrows, and then took from his suitcase a jeweler's glass which he put into his eye.

He examined the stone carefully, turning it this way and that for perhaps half a minute. When he spoke his tone was professional.

"It's a diamond, and quite a fine one. Not cut as well as it might be, but still a very nice stone."

"How much is it worth?"

Tompkins took the glass out of his eye, and grinned at them conspiratorially. "You notice I haven't asked where it came from, and I don't want to know. But if you were asking me to buy it, that's the first question I'd ask."

"I'm not asking you to buy it. What's it worth?"

"I'm telling you the difficulty about selling it is that any honest jeweler will ask the same question. He'll want to be sure it came into this country legally." Now Tompkins winked.

"We shouldn't want to sell it," Mary Blake said excitedly. "It's to make into a ring for me."

Tompkins rubbed his chin. "Hard to put a value on it. Wouldn't be dear at two hundred quid."

"Oh, you darling man," Mary Blake said. She kissed Tompkins on the cheek.

The Merry Widow was telling Gilbert Langham the story of her life, as they sat in deck chairs on the front. Her husband, a colonel in the Engineers, had gone through the war unscratched, and

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had then died in a yachting accident shortly after his retirement, three years ago.

"No children," she said, turning on him the full force of still-lustrous eyes. "And this rambling old house in Shropshire to look after. I'm a lonely woman, Gil."

Gilbert Langham was not much interested in her past. "You remember that yesterday evening we were sitting in the lounge of that hotel at Eastbourne. Did you happen to notice what time that man Antrobus came into the lounge?"

"I already told the police that as far as I could remember it was about six o'clock," Elaine Williams said coldly.

"You couldn't be more exact?"

"No. I must be going back to the hotel." As she got up she said, "I detest snoopers."

Gilbert Langham sighed. The way of an amateur detective is hard.

That night there was a fireworks display at the end of the Palace Pier, and tickets were free for those who wanted them.

"I must say," said Mr. Portingale, a self-important, pigeon-chested man who went about with a limp, long-nosed wife apparently permanently attached to his arm, "That young chap Benton knows how to manage things. As a businessman myself, I respect efficiency."

"He's very good," Gilbert Langham agreed. He was watching Mr. Antrobus to see if he took one of the tickets. He did, after asking whether they were free.

"My husband had thirty men under him at his retirement," Mrs. Portingale said in a melancholy voice.

"A versatile young fellow, too," Portingale resumed. "Used to be in the diamond trade, I understand. Adventurous."

"It takes all sorts to make a world," Mrs. Portingale said sadly.

"Yes, indeed." Langham took one of the tickets. The Portingales took them, too.

The night was hot, the sea still. Rockets swished up skyward, burst into patterns of stars. A set piece slowly made the pattern WELCOME TO BRIGHTON. There was a burst of clapping.

"It's simply gorgeous," Mary Blake said. "Perfect. I want it to last forever. Have you told Jerry about the ring, darling?"

"A hundred pounds is okay," her husband said. "I'll give you a

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check tomorrow." He produced the stone in its tissue and Benton took it.

"No checks, old man. Strictly cash. If you can let me have the money at the end of the tour I'll hand over the stone then." His teeth gleamed in a smile. "You can ask Tompkins to vet it for you again then, if you like. See you later." He waved a graceful hand.

"I wonder why he insists on cash." Blake took out his pipe and tapped it thoughtfully on the rail.

"He's just being careful, silly. Ooh!" A cascade of colored lights exploded just above the their heads. The hand that she had placed over her husband's clutched at him, the nails digging gently into his palm.

"I want some cigarettes," Elaine Williams said, and opened her bag. "Oh, damn! I've forgotten my purse."

Portingale, who was sitting just behind her, took out his case. She murmured her thanks, lighted the cigarette, took a few puffs, then murmured something about going back to the hotel, and got up.

It was a few minutes afterward that Langham, who had been temporarily enthralled by a set piece depicting the battle of Trafalgar, with the *Victory's* guns magnificently firing, noticed that Antrobus was not in his place. He got up and walked down the pier to look for him. But the man with gray hair had vanished.

Elaine Williams did not go back to the hotel. An hour later she was walking by the cliffs near Rottingdean, talking about her husband's death and the big house in Shropshire.

"Yes," her companion said. "Yes. Yes."

"The truth is that I am a very lonely woman."

"We are all lonely." Her companion took her hand and led her nearer to the cliff top.

"Sometimes—you'll think it foolish—my heart really aches." She guided his hand to her aching heart.

"You're not foolish at all." Another hand encircled her shoulder. She held up her face to be kissed.

Then she felt herself being forced backward, and opened her lips to scream, but the hand that had been on her heart quickly covered them. Her high heels scrabbled at the cliff edge before she went over . . .

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It was no more than eleven o'clock in the morning, but already a fierce sun shone into the little room. The sandy sergeant he had seen before waved Gilbert Langham into a seat directly facing the window and the glare. Superintendent Lake sat in the shade.

"Now, Mr. Langham, I shall value the results of your skilled observation. What have you got to tell me?"

"I still don't know exactly what's happened," Gilbert Langham said. "There are all sorts of rumors. Nobody knew that Mrs. Williams hadn't come back to the hotel until this morning. Your people haven't really told us much."

"She's dead," Lake said. "She fell, or was pushed, off the cliffs near Rottingdean some time yesterday evening. There's a drop of about eighty feet and she was probably killed at once. She'd been dead several hours when she was found, early this morning."

Lake paused, then said, "There was a book found near the body, looked as if it had been thrown from the cliff top."

He held up a book on the desk before him, its cover spotted with damp. Gilbert Langham read the title on the back. It was *The Suicide's Grave* by James Hogg.

"That's not been gutted."

"Not this time. But the queer thing is that it should have been there at all. What sort of woman was Mrs. Williams?"

"I thought of her as the Merry Widow. She was flirtatious, particularly with young men."

"With you, for instance?"

"Yes. Though I lost favor because I didn't react properly when she said she was lonely. She seemed to like Jerry Benton, the guide. But it didn't mean anything. She'd have behaved the same way with any other young man."

"Mr. Langham." Lake leaned forward. The outlines of his face were harsh. "It seems likely that Mrs. Williams died through what you call flirtatiousness with a young man—or an old one. And since whoever killed her left a mystery book, as he did with Miss Penny, it's a fair assumption that the murderer is linked with your coach party. I want you to tell me exactly what you saw and heard after going out to watch the fireworks."

"At about nine o'clock or a little after, Mrs. Williams left us, saying she was going to the hotel. She'd left her purse there, had no money to buy cigarettes—"

Lake interrupted. "She said she had no money—you're sure of that?"

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"Yes. A man named Portingale was sitting just behind her. He offered her a cigarette."

"Her handbag went over the cliff with her. There was a five-pound note in it."

"No purse?"

"Her purse was in the hotel. But a five-pound note is money. Why didn't she use it?"

A bluebottle buzzed on the windowpane. The glare of sunlight was hot on Gilbert Langham's body. He felt slightly damp.

Lake went on, "She didn't go back to the hotel—she went to meet somebody. It must all have been arranged in advance." He said sharply to Langham, "What happened after she left?"

Langham told him of Atrobus's disappearance and of his own movements.

"You say you got back to the hotel just after eleven. Nobody saw you?"

"No."

"You didn't go out again?"

"Of course not."

"I'm keeping the coach party here for the moment. Let me know if you have any intention of leaving Brighton, won't you?"

Gilbert Langham got up and said incredulously, "You mean you suspect *me*?"

"I suspect everybody." Lake smiled. "I'm still in need of suggestions, even from amateur criminologists."

"There ought to be some sort of clue in that book."

"There are no prints on it, if that's what you mean."

"No." Langham picked it up. "You see, this book is usually called *The Memoirs of a Justified Sinner*. This is a special edition, published in 1895, and it just might be possible to trace it."

"Nothing on the flyleaf, sir," said the sergeant.

"No, but—" Langham, leafing through the pages, gave an exclamation.

"What is it?" Lake came round the table, and Langham pointed out what he had found.

At the bottom of a page in the middle of the book, very small and faint, was a circular die-stamped mark. It said: *Charles Antrobus. Dealer in Rare Books. Specialist in Crime and the Occult.*

Lake said to the sergeant, "Duff, I think we'll have a word with Mr. Antrobus. No, hang on a minute. Ask Benton to come in first. I'd like to know whether he's got any details of when and how

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Antrobus booked for this coach tour, whether his bookings were linked with Miss Penny's and Mrs. Williams', for instance. That might help."

"Yes, sir."

"You're thinking we were stupid to have missed that," Lake said to Langham when the sergeant had left them.

"Why, no. This is a favorite book of mine. I happened to know it was an unusual edition—"

"It was careless. Two of us have looked through the book and we ought to have seen it. We've been doing fifty different things since the body was found this morning, but that's no excuse."

The Superintendent crossed to the window and stood looking out. The street was shimmering with heat.

"I don't know why people go abroad when we have weather like this in England."

"Have you found out anything more about Miss Penny?"

"Yes. It confirms that she was just what she seemed to be—a nice old lady who hadn't much money and lived a quiet life. There's no motive. Duff's taking his time." He rattled money in his pocket.

The door opened, and the sergeant came in, breathing hard. "He's not there, sir."

"Antrobus?"

"No, Benton."

Lake's face went very red. "I thought I gave instructions that nobody in the party was to leave the hotel until I'd talked to them."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant said stolidly. "We had men at the front door. Reckon he skipped down the fire escape. There are some people called Portingale looking for him—say he was in the hotel ten minutes ago."

"Right," Lake said. "Let's get up to his room."

Mr. Portingale, wife connected to him like a broken-down car being towed, was waiting for them in the passage. "Inspector, I have something I want to report to you—"

"Superintendent," Lake snapped. "It will have to wait." He turned to the sergeant. "Duff, he'll reckon on having at least half an hour's start. Chances are he'll take a train for London. Go to the station. Take someone with you who knows him by sight."

"I'll go along," Gilbert Langham said. In the car Sergeant Duff

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expressed himself rather scornfully about the likelihood of Benton catching a train.

"One of the Super's not so bright ideas," he said. "There's more ways out of Brighton than out of a rabbit's burrow. If he tries the train he wants his brains tested."

"It's the quickest way of getting up to London," Langham said absently.

He was astonished by the turn of events. If Benton was the murderer, what was the meaning of the books placed by the bodies? He was pondering this problem when the police car pulled up outside Brighton Station with a screech of brakes.

The station, clean and bright, was comparatively empty at this time of the morning and Duff, who had been so skeptical in the car, was full of energy in action. Within no time at all, it seemed, he had learned that the last train for London had gone half an hour back, and that the next one left in ten minutes' time from Platform Three.

"Wouldn't have had time for the last one," Duff said as they walked along the train corridor. "Now, you look out for him. Brown face, medium height, good-looking, bit film starrish, you said. Might apply to me, eh?" He was in his forties and looked like a sandy-haired monkey.

Benton was not on the train. "Didn't suppose he would be," Duff said as they went back along the platform. "Knew it was a wild goose chase. We'll just stay around till the train goes. You get over by the departure board there and make yourself inconspicuous. I'll stay by the entrance. Give me the office if you spot him."

Langham nodded. The train left at 12:15. At exactly thirteen minutes past twelve Jerry Benton walked briskly out of the station lavatory with an attaché case in his hand, looked once round the station, and began to walk to Platform Three. Gilbert Langham raised his hand and Duff nodded.

Perhaps it was this gesture that made Benton look toward the departure board. He saw Langham, changed direction, and began to run out of the station. Duff and Gilbert Langham ran after him. Benton had several yards start.

He was almost out of the station when a family consisting of father, mother, babe in arms, and a screaming small boy wearing a cowboy hat and carrying a spade and bucket, entered it. The small boy stuck the spade between Benton's legs and he went down with a crash. Before he could get up Duff and Langham

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were on him.

The small boy had stopped screaming, and looked slightly awe-struck at the effect of his work. "Now, Bertie," said his mother, "you didn't ought to have done that."

"Oh yes, he did," said Duff, holding Benton's arm in a lock. "He's helped to make an important arrest. Are you Wyatt Earp?" he asked the boy.

"Nah, I'm Matt Dillon."

"Well, buy yourself another gun, Matt, will you?" He gave the boy half a crown.

"Can't buy much of a gun for 'alf a crown," the boy said.

The last words they heard as they got into the police car were his mother's. "There you are, Bertie. I told you you should have left the gentleman alone."

"She's got the right idea," Benton said, and grinned.

He did not look like a murderer, Gilbert Langham thought. But then, had he any idea at all what this particular murderer did look like?

They went back to the hotel room where Lake had conducted his interrogations. There Mr. Portingale stood, indignation filling his pigeon chest. There also, Langham saw with surprise, were the Blakes.

"All right, Benton. What have you got to say?" Lake's tone was rough.

"I don't know what this is all about." Benton smiled. "I just got fed up with the job and decided to chuck it."

Lake sighed. "Mr. Portingale."

Mr. Portingale took from his pocket something wrapped in tissue. When he unwrapped the tissue a stone gleamed in the sunlight.

"You offered me this for a hundred pounds, said it was a diamond. Then this morning you asked me for twenty pounds cash deposit, which I gave you, and handed me the stone. Later on I happened to be speaking to Mr. Blake—"

Blake produced another stone. "We took them to a jeweler. They're not diamonds, just quartz."

"How many more have you got in that case?" Lake asked.

"Six," Benton said calmly. "I don't know what they're moaning about. I never guaranteed the stones. They were sold to me as diamonds. I suggested they should contact somebody who would

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check on them."

"It's no good, Benton," Lake nodded to Duff.

The sergeant went outside. When the door reopened it revealed, to Gilbert Langham's astonishment, the bald head, puce face, and checkered shirt of Tompkins. The backslapping geniality was gone, however. Tompkins had no eyes for anybody but Benton.

"You rat," he said, "skipping and leaving me to hold the bag. Did you think I'd go for that?"

"All right," Benton said. "It's a cop. But I had nothing to do with those two women getting done in. That put the wind up me, I don't mind telling you."

"If I'm not much mistaken we shall find that both these boys have got records as long as my arm," Lake said. He addressed himself to the Portingales and the Blakes. "A nice little racket they ran together. You see how it worked. Benton spread a rumor about smuggling diamonds, then showed you the stone. He couldn't let you take it away and show it to a jeweler, so Tompkins meanwhile makes it known that he's an expert, and also that he dislikes Benton. He certifies the stone as genuine. If everything had gone as planned, you'd have handed over a hundred pounds each at the end of the tour and never seen either of them again. You're lucky that Benton got the wind up and tried to skip."

"We had nothing to do with the other business," Tompkins said. "You can see it queered our pitch, the police coming in."

"I believe you," Lake said, and sighed again. "Take them away."

"That leaves Mr. Antrobus," Gilbert Langham said.

It was one o'clock, just two hours since he had made that momentous discovery about the book.

"Yes. We've delayed our talk with him long enough. What's his room number, Duff?"

"Second floor. Two fourteen. But he may have come down to the lounge."

The lounge was buzzing with excited members of the coach party who had seen Benton and Tompkins taken away by the police, but Antrobus was not among them. They took the elevator up. Duff strode ahead along the corridor.

"Here we are. Two ten, two twelve." He stopped abruptly, sniffing.

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"Gas." Lake put a handkerchief round his mouth and nose, and turned the door handle of Room 214. The room was not locked, the blinds were drawn. The smell of gas rushed out at them.

Lake ran across the room, pulled aside the curtain, opened the window wide, turned off the gas tap, and came out coughing. "Doctor," he said to Duff. The sergeant ran down the corridor.

Looking over Lake's shoulder, Gilbert Langham could see the body of Mr. Antrobus lying on the floor, his head near to, but not quite resting on, a pillow. The hose connecting the gas tap to a fire set into the wall had been pulled away and lay just by the man's mouth.

Lake drummed on the wall with his fingers while they waited for the gas to clear. "This looks like the end of the road."

"I suppose so." Yet Langham left queerly disappointed.

When they were able to enter the room they found further evidence. At a little writing desk in one corner of the room was a scrap of paper penciled in a fine, thin, clerkly hand: *I feel the bitterest regret for what has happened. I cannot go on . . .*"

Langham bent down to look at the note, and Lake said quickly, "Don't touch it."

"That paper has been torn off a larger sheet. I wonder why he was so parsimonious." The Superintendent was kneeling by the body, extracting a wallet from the jacket. There was a pencil beside the note, a yellow Venus 3B. Langham opened his mouth to say something else, then closed it again. Lake was going through the wallet.

"Pound notes—a wad of them. Membership cards of various societies. Check book. Nothing personal. Ah, this is interesting. Membership for the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association in the name of Charles Antrobus. He simply told me he'd retired from business. Ah, hello, Doctor."

The doctor examined the body briefly, then shook his head. "No hope, I'm afraid. He's had the gas tube in his mouth for hours."

"How many hours?"

"I wouldn't like to say. Some time last night, certainly. He's had a knock on the head at some time. Not very long ago, either."

"Enough to stun him?" Gilbert Langham asked.

"Possibly."

"Supposing he'd turned on the gas tap and sat down to write his suicide note," Lake suggested. "He might have been overcome by

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the gas, fallen, and struck his head on the gas fire. Could that have happened?"

"I suppose so," the doctor said, without much conviction.

"And that would explain why his head wasn't *on* the pillow but *beside* it. Suicides generally like to make themselves comfortable. But why didn't somebody find him earlier this morning? I think we might ask the reception desk. Then I suppose I should have a word with the rest of the tour party. Duff, will you get them together for me in one of the lounges?"

When they left the bedroom, the photographers and fingerprint men were at work. Downstairs, Lake said to the young receptionist,

"Did Mr. Antrobus in two fourteen leave any sort of message last night?"

"I'll find out for you, sir. Edward, the night porter, would have taken any message at that time."

Edward was old and gnarled as a tree trunk. "Mr. Antrobus? Yes, sir. He rang about eleven o'clock last night, said he had a migraine headache, and didn't want to be disturbed until after lunchtime today."

"Do you know Mr. Antrobus?" Langham asked. "Would you recognize his voice?"

The porter shook his head. "Why, no, sir. He was one of those on the coach tour, that's all I know. Wouldn't know him to speak to at all."

"You're hard to satisfy, Langham," Lake said. "You put us on to Antrobus in the first place. Now when you're proved right you're still unhappy."

"Somebody else could have been in that room, hit Antrobus on the head, put the gas tube in his mouth, and rung down to the porter."

"In theory, yes. In practice the obvious explanation is right ninety-nine times in every hundred. Just wait till we dig into Antrobus' background. You'll find he's a psycho, and that he killed those two women for some reason that doesn't make sense to you or me, and then committed suicide. Now I'm going to break the news to the rest of them. If I'm not much mistaken, with three casualties and two arrests in the party, they'll want to go home. Are you coming?"

Langham shook his head. He walked moodily toward the potted palms at the hotel entrance. The name "Antrobus," spoken behind

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him, made him turn. A blonde girl wearing a dark blue frock stood by the reception desk.

"Were you asking for Mr. Antrobus?" Langham said.

"Why, yes. I'm Sheila Antrobus. He's my uncle."

"I'll handle this," he said to the receptionist. And then to the girl: "You must be prepared for a shock."

She was shocked, certainly, but she did not seem deeply surprised. "Uncle Charles had been getting odder and odder ever since his wife died two years ago. It made things a bit difficult for me, because he was my guardian."

"Odd in what way?"

"He was a dealer in rare books—crime books especially. Soon after Aunt Rose died he gave all that up, and in the last few months it's sometimes seemed to me that he really hated books."

"There's something else. You'll have to know about it soon. I may as well tell you." He told her about Miss Penny and Elaine Williams. "Do you think he might have done that?"

She said in a subdued voice, "I don't know. I'd like to see him, please."

They went up to the room. She looked at the figure on the floor, shivered and turned away.

"There's something I want you to see." He led her over to the desk and showed her the note. "Is that your uncle's writing?"

"His prints are on it," one of the fingerprint men said. "And on the pencil."

"Poor uncle," the girl said. Her face was very pale.

They walked out of the hotel, along the Marine Parade and into the Old Steine. "There's something I want to ask you," Gilbert Langham said. "Did your uncle draw?"

"Sometimes. He wasn't very good, but he liked to sketch." She looked surprised. "Why?"

"I know something about pencils. That note on the desk—the one that's supposed to be a suicide note—was written with a thin fine pencil, probably a 2H. The pencil on the desk is a 3B, a drawing pencil."

She said nothing. They walked round into Church Street. The North Gate to the Royal Pavilion was in front of them. "Shall we go in?"

"All right." She stopped and faced him. "What does it mean, about the pencils?"

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"I believe your uncle was murdered. And if he was, then everything that has happened has been planned, with him as the final victim. You said he made things difficult for you. How?"

"I want to get married. I'm only twenty. Uncle Charles didn't approve of Chris. In fact, he very much disapproved. So we agreed to wait."

"Chris?"

"Chris Watling. The man I'm going to marry."

They stood in the Pavilion gardens, with the statue of George IV on one side and the cupola of the dome on the other, together with those other fragments of the eccentric architectural past now transformed to respectable library and art gallery. She opened her bag and took out a photograph. He looked at it, and felt as though he had been struck between the eyes.

The photograph told him almost the whole story.

"Tell me about Chris."

There was some unfathomable expression in her blue eyes. "You wanted to go into the Pavilion. Let's go, then."

He waved a hand at the onion domes. "Do you know Sydney Smith's joke about the Pavilion architecture? That the dome of St. Paul's must have come down to Brighton and pupped? But I like it."

She made no reply. They walked in silence through the Octagon Hall and the entrance hall. In the Chinese Corridor she said, staring intently at one of the bamboo plants on the wall. "What do you want to know?"

"About Chris."

"You've seen his photograph. He doesn't find it easy to settle in a job. That's what Uncle didn't like."

"He's been in trouble?"

"His father lost all his money when Chris was about thirteen. There was trouble a couple of years ago over some bad checks."

She turned to face him, her face desperate. "But he's awfully nice—Chris—he's such fun to be with. He's always wanting to do something dashing, something that will get his photograph in the papers. He makes a joke of it—he's full of jokes. There's nothing bad about him really. You've got to believe that."

"It might be easier for you if I guessed some of the story and you filled in the details. Your uncle was quite rich, and most of the money comes to you."

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"All of it. He's got no other close relations and he is—was—very fond of me."

"He disapproved of Chris, more strongly than you said. He blamed himself for letting you go about with Chris, told you to stop seeing him, threatened in the good old Victorian way to cut you out of his will. Right?"

"I told you. I'm not twenty-one yet and I didn't want to upset uncle. Do you think I cared about the money?"

"Chris cared about it, though. Didn't he?"

She turned and ran from him, ran back through the halls, while shocked respectable holiday-goers, wearing sleeveless shirts and with shorts above sun-reddened knees, looked after her. He found her in the garden.

"If your uncle died the money would come to you, and there would be no obstacle to your marriage. Uncle Charles was eccentric—he did odd things like coming on this coach tour. Why did he do that, by the way?"

"He always went on tours. He was awfully mean in little ways—said they were wonderful value for money. And this one attracted him because of going to a different place each day. All the places had piers. He loved playing the slot machines." She smiled faintly.

"Yes. Uncle Charles was eccentric, but he wasn't crazy. If Chris murdered him and tried to make it look like suicide, questions would be asked.

"But supposing it could be shown that Uncle Charles had really gone round the bend—supposing he'd killed two people and left the books he now hated beside his victims—then his suicide wouldn't be questioned. Superintendent Lake is prepared to accept it now."

"You mean that those two people, Miss Penny and Mrs. Williams, were murdered just to—"

"To convince people that your Uncle Charles was a psychopathic killer? I'm afraid so." He paused, said abruptly, "You recognized that so-called suicide note, didn't you? It was part of a letter from your Uncle to Chris."

"I don't know. There *was* a letter in which Uncle said something like that, about blaming himself for letting me go around with Chris. But I still can't believe it was the same note. What makes you so sure?"

"Why, you see," Gilbert Langham said, "I know who Chris is."

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When they got back to the hotel, Mr. Portingale stood in the doorway beside the potted palms. "Have you heard the news?" he asked eagerly. "Do you know that we have been nursing a pair of scoundrelly tricksters in our midst?"

Langham had almost forgotten about Benton and Tompkins. "The Superintendent has got them under lock and key, though, hasn't he?"

"Would you believe it, my dear sir, they tried to practice their arts on me. I'm afraid they picked the wrong person there, eh, Mrs. P.?" Mrs. Portingale, firmly attached to one arm, smiled and nodded. "But as a result our happy little party is broken up. The coach company is making a very handsome refund, and Mrs. P. and I are departing for fresh fields and pastures new."

To call the party a happy one seemed to Langham an overstatement. "Where are you going?"

Mr. Portingale beamed. "We are lucky enough to have been able to book with another coach tour. We are off to the New Forest. I believe that there are still one or two vacancies if you would care to—"

"No, thank you," Langham said hurriedly.

Sergeant Duff said cheerfully, "Where have you been? The Super's been looking for you—wants to pin a medal on your chest, I shouldn't wonder."

Langham said a little pompously. "This is Mr. Antrobus' niece, Sheila. We've got to see the Superintendent urgently. Some fresh information about the case."

Duff scratched his sandy head. "The trouble with you amateurs is you never can let well alone. The Super's round at the station."

They went to the station and found Lake. He listened impatiently, until Sheila Antrobus produced the photograph.

"That's Chris Watling," Gilbert Langham said.

Lake gasped. Then he said, "This seems to be an occasion for a little telephoning." When he put down the receiver after a telephone call to London he said, "He's in Folkestone."

"What are we waiting for?" Langham asked.

From the promenade at Folkestone you can reach the beach either by way of the two lifts that go up and down together, working in series, or, more circuitously, by the famous zigzag with its right-angled paths separated by banks of shrubs. Or you can get to the beach by going through the Old Town, emerging near the

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harbor. The police car came round there and stopped.

They began to walk across the shingle, past the children's playground.

"You understand what to do, Miss Antrobus?" Lake said. "If you don't feel up to it, say so now."

"I'm up to it."

"Good." Lake was brisk. "We'll follow you slowly as you walk along the lower promenade. We won't be more than a few yards away."

The lower promenade was full of people buying candy, ice cream, and cups of tea. Children were crowded round a Punch and Judy show.

Langham jumped down to the pebbled beach and watched. Sheila Antrobus threaded her way along through the people, putting one foot precisely before another, unhurried and cool-looking in her dark blue dress.

She stopped in front of a hut that stood beside an ice cream stall, and said, "Hullo, Chris."

The young man who had called himself Charlie Wilson was talking earnestly to a prospective customer for Nu-Stile-Pickshers. He stopped speaking, and the look on his face was, for a moment, that of one who wakes to find that some private nightmare—the death of a loved child or an ordeal by fire—has come true. Then his engagingly boyish smile was in place again, and he said, "Why, Sheila ducks, whatever are you doing in Folkestone?"

"You didn't tell me you were doing this sort of thing."

"I said I was doing a job for a few weeks that was great fun. Don't you call this fun?" He said to the customer, "Do go in, madam, you'll find the photographer inside. And don't forget, if you get a lucky number you win one of today's cash prizes."

"Chris, I want to talk to you."

"Of course, ducks." He shouted—and how well Gilbert Langham, who heard it before, remembered his shouting the same words—"Just going for a cuppa." He fell into step with her and said, "There's a little place along here with an old lady running it who just loves me."

"They all love you, don't they?" Sheila Antrobus said. "I mean, the ladies."

He stared at her with what seemed unaffected surprise. "I don't know what you mean. If you don't like my doing this job, all

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right. You're always saying I ought to work, and there aren't so many jobs that fit my peculiar talents."

Sheila Antrobus went on talking, slowly and without expression, as though some sort of machine had been wound up inside her. "Especially the ladies who got the prizes. That was the way it happened, wasn't it? You found out the people who were on the coach tour, got into conversation as they passed you, had their photographs taken or took them yourself, and then told the ones you picked, the unattached women, that their number had come up and they'd won a prize. After that, naturally they were delighted to meet such a charming young man a little later on to receive the prize. That was where the five-pound note came from that was in Mrs. Williams' handbag, wasn't it? You left that note in her bag by mistake, didn't you? Careless, Chris."

"Sheila." He jumped back as though she had jabbed him with a needle.

"And it wasn't really a clever idea to leave that note, from the letter he wrote you. If I came down, there was a good chance I'd recognize it. But I suppose you thought I'd marry you anyway."

Very slowly now, the record dying down, she said, "After we'd married, Chris, what would have happened to me?"

He made an ineffectual gesture with his hand, still backing away. Langham began to move up the shingle and at the same time Lake and Duff, behind Sheila, quickened their steps.

Chris Watling turned, bolted for the nearest entrance to the zigzag and begun to run up it.

Lake and Duff went after him. Langham paused beside the girl who stood, looking upward, with no expression at all on her face.

"That must have been terrible for you."

Her voice was harsh. "I've done what you asked, haven't I? You said I could break him down, while the police might not be able to do. Now he's running. That's what you all wanted."

"You talk as though you didn't want him to be caught. He's killed three people."

"I love him." She said it flatly. They watched the figures running up the paths between the shrubs. "He's gaining on them."

"Lake's got a man waiting at the top."

For a few moments Watling was out of sight, hidden by a turn in the path. Then he emerged, and they could see the man who stood solidly blocking the exit. Watling took something from his pocket and ran toward the man at the top.

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"He's got a gun," Langham said.

They heard two small sharp cracks, and the man went down. They could see Watling now, far above, running along the front, firing backward at Lake and Duff. He reached the entrance to the lift leading down the beach, and paused.

"He's coming down." Langham began to run toward the red-brick Victorian lift house. The girl followed him.

When they reached it, Langham said to the attendant, "There's a man coming down in that lift who's wanted for murder. Can't you stop him?"

"No, sir. He can't get out, though. Door's bolted outside."

They stared up and saw the great wooden cage on wheels descending. Above it was a sign: *The Lift. Fare 3d. One Minute to Center of Town.* The two lifts moving up and down worked together, and as the wooden cage from the top descended they could see some sort of confused activity inside it. There was a crash of glass, and they saw Watling climbing out of the window, still holding the revolver. He swung out and up onto the curved lift roof.

"He's going to jump over to the other one," Langham said.

No doubt Lake and Duff were now running down the slope, and Watling thought he might get away at the top. It was almost certainly hopeless—the crowd would never let him off the lift, revolver or no revolver—but he was going to try it.

They watched him poised on the top of the sloping cage as it slowly descended and the other lift rose to meet it. When the two cages were almost level, he jumped easily from one to the other.

"He's done it," the attendant cried out.

But Watling had failed to get a proper purchase on the lift's curved top. They could see him desperately trying to get a grip with hands and feet. Like a figure in a slow motion film his body slipped away from the lift roof. Then suddenly he dropped, limp as a puppet.

Sheila Antrobus turned away her head and screamed.

The broken thing that had caught in the cable at the bottom was not quite dead when Gilbert Langham reached it. The lips moved, whispered, "Sheila."

"Yes?"

The smile was as engaging as ever. "Tell her I shall have my picture in the papers."

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Ellery Queen

Wedding Anniversary

Ernst Bauenfel was probably the best-loved man in Wrightsville. His benevolence was a byword—indeed, it had earned him the title of "Mr. Bountiful." He was a man without an enemy—and yet . . . One of Ellery's strangest cases—with a strange clue of the sort that only Ellery seems to encounter in these days of so much "clueless detection" . . .

Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

In spite of his passion for Wrightsville, hardly a visit of Ellery's does not turn up some major crime, as if in savage welcome to his gifts. Compelled to use them against the object of his affection, he yet goes back, again and again and again, hopefully turning the other cheek. It is no reward for his devotion.

On this occasion he was beguiled by the season. The magnolias were in their improbable New England bloom, the syringa enriched the town with outcroppings of gold, the grass in Memorial Park stretched in greenest innocence, the ancient maples along State Street were in their infant leaf. It was simply not a day for death.

Or so Ellery told himself.

He cut across the Square (which is round), passed the Town Hall and the American Legion Bandstand, and turned into the alley of the County Court House Building, whose downstairs west wing houses the Wrightsville Police Department.

"I'm dodderin'," Chief Anselm Newby said, pumping Ellery's hand. "When you called from the Hollis to ask me to supper, I clean forgot about Mr. B.'s anniversary blowout. So I phoned him and he said, 'Sure, bring Mr. Queen along.' I hope you don't mind, Ellery."

It appeared that Ellery did not mind; to the contrary. Ernst Bauenfel was one of the few prominent Wrightsvillians whose path had never happened to intersect his, even though he kept

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running across the name in the news and advertising columns of the *Wrightsville Record,* to which he was a mail subscriber.

As the town reckoned such things, Bauenfel was a newcomer to the community. But what he lacked in local ancestry he more than made up by good works. As one of the leading merchants of High Village—he was a jeweler, with branches strewn about the state—Bauenfel's was to Wright County what Cartier's is to Fifth Avenue. He was a past president of the Chamber of Commerce, he held high office in most of the benevolent societies, he had twice been elected to the Board of Selectmen, he was regularly asked to take charge of the Red Cross, Community Chest, and other important drives, and his private benefactions had earned him the title of "Mr. Bountiful," which the *Record* abbreviated to Mr. B. It was said that no one ever came to Mr. B. in genuine need and went away empty-handed.

"From all I read about him," Ellery said as Chief Newby drove him up toward Hill Drive, "he's the nearest thing to a civic saint that Wrightsville's ever had."

"There isn't a living soul in Low Village or High," the police chief said, "who doesn't swear by him."

"Aren't you forgetting some juicy rumors a year ago, Anse?"

"You mean when he remarried?" Newby grunted. "You know small towns. They even talked when he got married the first time. Hester, his first wife, was a lot younger than Mr. B.—she was twenty-five when she gave birth to Amy, their only child, and Ernst was more than double that, fifty-five—and it made a lot of tongues go clickety-clack in the ladies' auxiliaries, especially since Hester was a Dade, and you know how far back the Dades go in this town. But the gabble soon died out, and there wasn't another unkind word said about Mr. B. until last year, after Hester died in that auto smashup. I mean, when he married Zelda Brown, Al Brown's youngest—the ice-cream parlor Brown—less than a month after Hester's funeral."

"What was the scoop?" Ellery asked in his nosiest Wrightsville tone. "The *Record* was annoyingly tactful."

"Well, for one thing, Zelda was Mr. B.'s secretary-bookkeeper in his Wrightsville branch store; they were together a lot. And Zelda's pretty sexy-looking. So as soon as Mr. B. married her the ladies began whispering that they'd been having an affair behind Hester's back. The damn flapmouths! I know Mr. B., and in my book he's as straight as they come. Of course, the short time be-

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tween Hester's death and Ernst's remarrying helped the gossip along—"

"Some men are born for marriage," said Ellery, with the authority of one who was not.

"—but it wasn't only that. Ernst pulled the boner, or maybe in the excitement he just forgot, of marrying Zelda on what would have been Hester's birthday."

"The most generous of men," the sage pointed out, "is often the least tactful."

"Anyway, Ellery, that's ancient history. The biddies haven't found a thing to rip Zelda up the back for in the year she and Ernst have been hitched. She's raising Hester's kid—Amy is five now—as if she were her own flesh and blood, and that sort of thing goes a long way in this town. They're good people, Ellery. You'll like 'em."

As, indeed, Ellery did. He liked everything about the Bauenfels, from their chalet-type house with its squared-timber construction and steeply projecting eaves (evidently built by Mr. B. in an early nostalgia for his native Switzerland, to what must have been the astonishment of its Colonial neighbors on Hill Drive) to the solid *bürgerstand* furnishings of the interior.

They were simple, hearty folk, like a peasant soup. Mr. B. was portly and florid, with a gray Teutonic brush and eyes with a malty sparkle; he wore a brocaded vest festooned with a heavy gold watchchain; and Ellery thought he needed only a tray and a white apron tied around his girth to step into a *Züricher* beer-garden. As for Zelda Bauenfel, née Brown, Ellery almost failed to recognize her. He had last seen Zelda as a nubile teen-ager working after school hours in her father's ice cream emporium on Lower Main. Now she was a well-fleshed, handsome *hausfrau* in a struggling girdle, cheerful and authoritative and obviously well-loved.

It took no seer, either, to divine the affection between Zelda and her husband's first wife's child. At the approach of the stranger, little Amy clung to her stepmother's skirt, her pale Dade eyes enormous. Zelda briskly soothed her, Ellery went to work on her, and in a few minutes the child was on his lap.

"We used to love you," Amy lisped.

"Really, Amy?" Ellery said. "When was that?"

"When my mommy was bery young."

"And that, young lady," said Zelda, pink as a geranium, "is the

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last time I'm ever going to tell you any of my girlish secrets! Kiss Mr. Queen and Chief Newby and your papa good night, and off to bed."

"I ought to feel jealous, Mr. Queen," chuckled Ernst Bauenfel as his wife took the little girl upstairs. "That is a secret my Zelda never confided in *me*." He had a slight German accent.

"Or me, worse luck."

"But I am not a jealous man; it is one of the things for which I thank God. Too many waste their lives envying and hating. And I am being a Saturday-night philosopher! I think that is our other guests—excuse me." And Mr. B. hastily went to the front door.

"I told you," Newby laughed.

"I'm glad I came, Anse."

But Ellery's gladness was within a half hour of destruction.

The three other guests were men also. At first Ellery suspected that the absence of ladies might be significant. But it turned out that Franklin Lang was a bachelor, Rob Packard was a widower, and Martin Overbrook's wife was entertaining an uninvited spring virus and had insisted on her husband not disappointing the Bauenfels on their anniversary party.

Of the three, Ellery had met only Lang. A tall weedy man with an occupational tic under his eye and bottle-fed veins in his nose, Lang was managing editor of the *Record*; Ellery's visits to Wrightsville, which the *Record* considered news, had brought them into contact from time to time. The newspaperman had always struck Ellery as rather indrawn. There was nothing indrawn about Franklin Lang this evening. He punched Mr. B.'s heavy shoulder and then threw a long arm around it.

Ellery knew Rob Packard by hearsay. He was a one-time real estate broker who had blossomed overnight into a general building contractor and had actually succeeded in supplanting that hardy Wrightsville perennial, J. C. Pettigrew, as chairman of the town's Realty Board. Packard was a red-haired man in an Italian silk suit and a bow tie, with a handshake like an oil salesman.

He, too, embraced his host.

Martin Overbrook Ellery did not know at all, although he recalled that one of the old red-brick buildings in Low Village bore the white-on-black stencil, *Overbrook Paperbox Factory,* on its grimy side walls. Overbrook was a feisty little fellow who came bursting in like the White Rabbit, glancing at his watch and cry-

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ing, "Am I late, Mr. B.? I hope I'm not late—Jinny couldn't come, she's down sick—oh, she phoned Zelda, I forgot—congratulations," beaming all the while, the reports of his Yankee voice bouncing around the room like shellfire.

There were hail-fellow introductions and lively conversation, a good deal of it concerned with the unexpected presence of Wrightsville's self-adopted son; then Zelda Bauenfel came flying downstairs, everything bobbing, and there was more embracing, and some jokes about first anniversaries, and much laughter; whereupon Mrs. B. dug her elbow into Mr. B.'s meaty ribs and said, "You're a fine host, you are! Weren't you supposed to do something the very first thing?"; and Ernst Bauenfel seized his head and exclaimed, "*Ach,* I forgot! Excuse me a minute," and trotted out to return a moment later pushing a bar cart with a bucketed bottle of champagne on it and a queerly shaped liqueur bottle, six wine glasses and a liqueur glass (and now he does look like a *biergarten* waiter, Ellery grinned to himself).

"Well, open it, Ernst," said Mrs. B., "what are you standing there for?"; and Mr. B. with a sly smile said, "Before the very first thing comes the *very* first thing, Zelda," and he took from the pocket of his jacket a jewel box and offered it to her, saying, "As a jeweler, I know that the first anniversary gift should be a clock. But how could a clock express my feeling? Open it, *liebchen*"; and Zelda Bauenfel opened the box, and gasped, and held high a magnificent emerald bracelet, and burst into tears. Then she rushed into her husband's arms, and he said softly, "I wish I could give you the whole world, Zelda," and it was said with such simplicity that no one was embarrassed, not even Ellery, who was allergic to clichés.

And when Zelda had blown her nose, and tried on the bracelet, and everyone had exclaimed over it, Ernst Bauenfel cried, "To work!" and he began struggling with the champagne cork, popping it unexpectedly and drenching himself, his young wife laughing so hard that every curve in her body described a parabola.

Then Mr. B. was filling the wine glasses and passing them around; and when Ellery said, "You've left yourself out, Mr. Bauenfel," Mr. B. shook his head and said, "Zelda will tell you I am no drinker, Mr. Queen. I never drink anything but the liqueur, and this only on very special occasions, like tonight," and he opened the liqueur bottle and poured himself a critical quantity of its topaz-colored contents, as if each drop was precious; and

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then he held up his glass and said, "My friends, a toast. I give you a German proverb: When an old man marries a young wife, death laughs. To my Zelda!" and the guests echoed, "Zelda!", and drank their champagne, and Ernst Bauenfel raised his liqueur glass to his lips and looked at his blushing wife over the rim, and chuckled, and threw his head back and drained the glass—which was not, in Ellery's view, the respectful way to imbibe a prized liqueur, even in a toast—and then the jeweler's eyes opened wide, and he clutched his throat with a hoarse cry and groped with the other hand as if seeking something to hang onto, and finally fell heavily to the floor, where he lay, incredibly, writhing.

And Ellery found himself on his knees beside the stricken man, saying, "Poison, poison. Anse, call Conk Farnham—hurry!" and while Chief Newby ran to phone Dr. Farnham, Franklin Lang led an open-mouthed young wife away, and Rob Packard and Martin Overbrook hovered over their recumbent friend with popping eyes. The writhings had stilled and the breathing had become shallow and very rapid.

"Mr. Bauenfel—Ernst," Ellery said urgently. "Can you hear me? Do you know who did this? Who poisoned your liqueur?"

The cyanosing lips tried desperately to tell him. But they could not. Then an odd thing happened. The dying man's left hand fumbled its way to his abdomen and found the lower left-hand pocket of his brocaded vest. With his forefinger and thumb he made his way in little stabs into the pocket. Then he withdrew his fingers and stretched out his hand as if offering something, and his heavy body arched like a drawn bow, and released its arrow.

And there he lay.

"Dead," said Ellery bitterly. "I swear I'll never set foot in Wrightsville again."

But then he opened Ernst Bauenfel's left hand.

In it lay a large unset diamond.

"What was he trying to tell you?" Packard, the building contractor, muttered.

"With a diamond, of all things," said little Overbrook, the paperbox manufacturer. "Why a diamond?"

But before Ellery could reply, Chief Newby came back.

"Dr. Farnham will be over as soon as they locate him," said the police chief, and then he stopped. "He's *dead?*" he said, looking down at his friend. "Mr. B.?"

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"I'm sorry, Anse."

"You're sorry. We were his best friends."

"I know." And after a moment Ellery said, "A quick-acting poison. It can only have been in that bottle of whatever it is—the liqueur."

"Who could have wanted to kill Ernst?" said Packard. There were tears in his eyes; and Overbrook turned away.

The police chief picked up the bottle by the neck, sniffed its contents, and set it softly down. He was one of those occasional small compact men who contrive to look as if they are made of rock. His sensitive face was now as hard as the rest of him. He went over to the settee, unfolded an afghan, and draped it carefully over Ernst Bauenfel's body. Then he turned away, saying, "I never heard of this stuff," jerking his head toward the liqueur bottle. "What is it?"

Ellery came to. He inspected the label. "It's new to me, too. Made at a monastery in Switzerland. Zelda should know."

"Zelda does know," said Zelda; and the newly made widow appeared in the archway, followed by Lang, who was shaking his head as if to say, "I couldn't keep her away." The young woman's face was blotched from weeping, but it was set in as rocky planes as Newby's. She went over to the corner of the settee, near her husband's body, and sat down. "No, I'm all right," she said as Ellery and Newby stepped toward her. "I want to help. I've got to help. Mr. Queen, what do you want to know?"

"All about the liqueur. I've never heard of it."

"Its never been sold outside Switzerland, because the monks could only make small quantities. Ernst adored it—it's the only alcohol he could drink, as he told you. Then the monastery was disbanded. Ernst bought up as many bottles as he could find—about half a dozen, I think it was—and brought them with him from the old country when he came to the United States."

"How many bottles are left?"

"This is the last one. He kept hoarding it. It's the only thing Ernst was selfish about."

"That's true, Ellery," Franklin Lang said. "Ernst would give you the socks off his feet, but in all the years I knew him he never offered me a drink out of this bottle. Did he ever offer you any, Rob?"

Packard shook his head, and Martin Overbrook said, "Mr. B. dead. It's not possible," and again turned away.

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"In other words, no one ever drank from this bottle except your husband, Zelda? Not even you?"

"That's right, Mr. Queen." Now she was struggling to control her voice. "In fact, tonight is the first time I've seen even Ernst drink any, there's so little left in the bottle. He was trying to make it last as long as possible."

"Then the poison could only have been intended for him," Chief Newby said in harsh tones. "And what's this I heard about a diamond, Ellery?"

"When you went to phone Farnham, I asked Bauenfel if he knew who poisoned him. He tried to talk but couldn't. The last act of his life was to take the diamond out of his vest pocket."

The police chief examined it. "I don't see anything special about it except its size. Do you know anything about this, Zelda?"

The young widow shook her head. "I didn't even know he was carrying it. Ernst often had unset gems in his pockets. Most jewelers do."

"He was trying to answer your question, Mr. Queen. Is that what you think?" asked the contractor.

"I don't see what other construction we can put on the last responsive act of a dying man," Ellery said. "Who killed you? I ask him, and he answers with a diamond. So we have to start from the diamond."

"A diamond," said the paperbox man, "is a diamond."

"Yes, Mr. Overbrook, but it also stands for something. Remember the occasion. This was his wedding anniversary party; the anniversary was uppermost on Ernst Bauenfel's mind. So let's think of a diamond in relation to wedding anniversaries.

"In the traditional listing," said Ellery, "the diamond is associated with the sixtieth and seventy-fifth wedding anniversaries. In that list the gift for a first anniversary is paper. But when Ernst, earlier this evening, mentioned the gift *he* associated with first anniversaries, he didn't say paper, he said a clock. Well, the clock as a first-anniversary gift happens to head the official list authorized by the jewelry industry. In the jewelers' list a diamond represents the thirtieth wedding anniversary. Ernst was a jeweler. We have the right to assume that, in answering my question as to who poisoned him, he replied with the jeweler's symbol for thirty."

"Thirty," muttered Chief Newby. "Who the devil could he have meant by thirty? It makes no sense."

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Ellery was silent. Suddenly he said, "I hope no one will mind if I make an experiment? Mr. Overbrook, do you have a connection with anything associated with thirty?"

The little manufacturer jumped. "You mean you suspect me of having poisoned Mr. B.'s bottle?" he sputtered. "I don't like your experiment, Mr. Queen! Or your question!"

"Why don't you answer it, Martie?" asked Zelda Bauenfel quietly.

"What do you mean, Zelda? I couldn't have been closer to Ernst if I'd been his brother!"

"Yes, Martie," she said, "but have you forgotten about the loan?"

"Loan?" Overbrook licked his lips. "I don't see what that has to do with anything . . ."

"What loan?" asked Ellery.

"This is ridiculous! Three years ago I was foreman of the paperbox factory. The owner decided to retire. He offered me the chance to buy him out, but I didn't have nearly enough cash to put down, and I couldn't give the bank the collateral they wanted. Ernst came to my rescue. Without a cent of collateral he loaned me enough to finance my purchase of the factory."

"How much was the loan?"

Overbrook licked his lips again. "Thirty thousand dollars." He went on quickly, "But that's just a coincidence—"

"It may well be, because at least one other thirty is represented here." And Ellery swung about to face Franklin Lang.

"Me?" said Lang.

"I'm afraid so, Frank. As a newspaperman and managing editor of the *Record,* you don't have to be reminded that the numeral 30 written at the end of newspaper copy means 'the end'; it's a trade-wide symbol in journalism, at least in this country. I merely point it out, Frank."

The newspaperman snapped, "I felt toward Ernst the way Martie Overbrook and Rob Packard did, and everyone else in town. Four years ago I was hospitalized for eight months after an operation. I had no savings, and the medical expenses were enormous. Well, for almost that entire period Mr. B. paid my bills. Does it stand to reason I'd repay him with poison? It wasn't even a loan—Ernst wouldn't hear of my paying him back. Besides, about this thirty nonsense—how many people outside the newspaper field have ever heard of it?"

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"A point," Ellery conceded. He looked at the building contractor. "I wonder, Mr. Packard, about you."

"And thirty?" Rob Packard nodded slowly. "It's a queer thing, Mr. Queen, but there's a tie between me and Ernst, too, in that regard. It was Ernst who got me out of the realty brokerage game. He owned a parcel out in Hill Valley, near the airport, and he came to me with a proposition. He foresaw that Wrightsville housing was going to expand in that direction, and he offered to put up the land and the financing, with me providing the know-how and the management, on a partnership basis. I snapped at it like a trout. It started me out as a building contractor. We named the development Thirty Acres, from the amount of land we built on. You'll find it on all the newer maps of Wrightsville." Then Packard said, "Does that sound as if I'd want to kill Ernst Bauenfel?"

Ellery said ruefully, "I admit, motive in this case is the tough one. Probably half of Wrightsville could come up with similar favors that Mr. B. did for them. By the way, Zelda," he said suddenly, turning to her, "your husband was a wealthy man. And you're young enough to have been his daughter. Forgive me, but it's happened before. At the least, his death would mean to you—"

"In terms of gain, Mr. Queen," said Zelda Bauenfel, examining him as if he were a germ under a microscope, "absolutely nothing. When we got married a year ago, I insisted that Ernst write a will to leave Amy everything he had. I had reasons for this which aren't anyone's business, but in view of what's happened I'll tell you.

"In the first place there was the talk, as I suppose you've heard. Well, I didn't want Ernst—when he heard the gossip—to think I'd married him for his money.

"In the second place I wanted to protect Amy and, incidentally, reassure Ernst about her future. After all, I wasn't her real mother, and if Ernst died before I did, which was likely, he being so much older than I, Amy would be left to my care. We had quite an argument about the will. Finally, Ernst compromised. He made it out in such a way that, after three years of marriage, Amy and I would share his estate equally.

"With Ernst dead now, after only one year, I'm left with nothing. Why would I kill him? As unthinkable as that is."

"Not unthinkable," said Ellery gently. "Here's a possible reason, as old as the hills and as new as this spring: another man."

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Her chin came up. "You look for one, Mr. Queen. You, too, Anse. Look all you want. You won't find any. I loved my husband, and I've been faithful to him."

Ellery half turned away, frowning.

"Don't any of you blame Mr. Queen," said Chief Newby in a mumble. "Questions like these have to be asked . . . Zelda, Ernst kept the liqueur bottle in the liquor cabinet in the dining room, didn't he? Did he keep the cabinet locked?"

"Ernst never locked anything here, Anse. You know that."

"Then anybody could have got to that bottle! I don't know how many people in town have been entertained in this house at one time or another. We'll fingerprint the bottle, but my hunch is this is going to be a long, long job."

"Maybe not so long," said Ellery; and he turned to the widow again. "Zelda, you and Ernst weren't married in Wrightsville, were you?"

The question took her by surprise. "Well, no, Mr. Queen. We thought it . . . best to do it in Connhaven, and we went straight on to New York, where we spent our honeymoon. We left Amy with my mother while we were away."

"Then that could be it." Unaccountably, Ellery looked relaxed and relieved. "There's no legal proof, Anse, but I can give you a theory that covers all the facts."

"Earlier this evening," said Ellery, "Zelda said that she had never seen Ernst take a drink of his private-stock liqueur before tonight. In recalling this, I wondered why he hadn't dipped into it when he and Zelda were married, which would surely be one of those extra-special occasions on which he could be expected to indulge. Zelda just gave us the reason: they weren't married in Wrightsville, and they spent their honeymoon in New York. So Mr. B. had no access to the bottle when he and Zelda married.

"Since only three or four weeks elapsed between his first wife's funeral and his remarriage, it's reasonable to assume that Ernst had last taken a drink from that bottle during his first marriage—*that is, while Hester Dade was still alive.*

"Put that together," said Ellery swiftly, "with the climate in this town a year ago. There was plenty of talk, you told me, Anse, when Mr. B. and Zelda Brown married. Zelda was working for Ernst up to that time. Suppose before her fatal automobile accident Hester had got a jump on the gossips—suspected that there

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was something going on between her husband and his secretary-bookkeeper. Suppose, true or not, it became an *idée fixe* in Hester's mind. Suppose, in her jealousy, Hester poured poison into the bottle of liqueur from which only her husband ever drank."

"Hester," Zelda Bauenfel whispered.

"Tonight, when he realized he had been poisoned," Ellery went on, "Mr. B. remembered something, just what we'll never learn. But it was enough to convince him that his liqueur had been poisoned by Hester. Unable to speak, he used his last strength and took out the diamond to leave us a clue—the 'thirty' clue. He was too far gone to realize that it might point to his three best friends as well."

"I still don't get it," complained the police chief. "How does this thirty thing tag Hester for the poisoning?"

"You told me yourself, Anse, on our drive up here. Hester, you said, was twenty-five years old when she gave birth to Amy. Amy is now five. You also told me that Ernst married Zelda on Hester's birthday. So today is not only Ernst's and Zelda's first wedding anniversary, *it would have been Hester's thirtieth birthday.*"

Chief Anselm Newby was never able to prove that Hester Dade Bauenfel reached out from the grave to kill Mr. Bountiful, but then Newby never pinned the murder on anyone else, either. To tell the truth, he didn't try very hard.

As for Ellery, while it is to be doubted that his absence will remain permanent, the fact is he has not yet paid another visit to his favorite scene of the crime, Wrightsville.

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